



International JPIC Newsletter Peace & Demilitarization

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Missionary Society of St. Columban

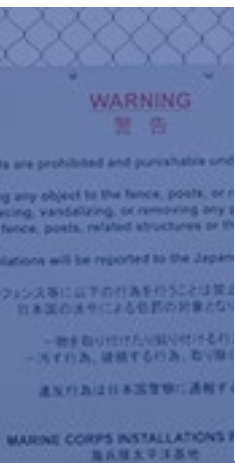


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"Holding a Tide of Tears"

By Amy Woolam Echeverria, Co-Editor

Reflecting on Mary this week, I came across a poem by John O'Donohue, "The Nativity."

No man reaches where the moon touches a woman.

Even the moon leaves her when she opens.

Deeper in to the ripple in her womb

That encircles dark to become flesh and bone.

Someone is coming ashore in her.

A face deciphers itself from water

And she curves around the gathering wave,

Opening to offer the life it craves.

In a corner stall of pilgrim strangers,

She falls and heaves, holding a tide of tears.

A red wire of pain feeds through every vein

Until night unweaves and the child reaches

dawn.

Outside each other now, she sees him first.

Flesh of her flesh, her dreamt son safe on earth.

2020 has felt a bit like this; holding a tide of tears, a red wire of pain through every vein. My prayer this Christmas for you, for us, and for the whole world, is that with each heaving and pulsing of labor we come closer to holding the flesh of our flesh, the incarnation of reconciling justice, peace, love, and joy.



Thank you to all, friends and collaborators for your creativity and communion in this shared mission.

Merry Christmas
and Happy New
Year,

Amy



“No Justice, No Peace”

By Wesley Cocozello, Co-Editor

On May 25 in Minneapolis, MN, a white police officer knelt on George Floyd’s neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. During the final two minutes, Mr. Floyd was motionless and had no pulse. The police officer kept his knee on Mr. Floyd’s neck even as emergency medical personnel arrived.

The murder of yet another black individual by an officer of the law provoked a months-long protest in the United States. I was fortunate to be able to attend several of the protests in Washington, DC, where I learned so much from the “social poets” that lead us in the struggle against racial injustice.

These “social poets,” as Pope Francis calls them his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, “make possible an integral human development that goes beyond ‘the idea of social policies being a policy for the poor, but never with the poor and never of the poor.’ They may be troublesome ... [but] without them ‘democracy atrophies, turns into a mere word, a formality’” (169).

These social poets (such as local organizers for Black Lives Matter) inspired countless white people to get into the streets. They inspired US bishops, for example, Bishop Mark Seitz in El Paso who “took a knee” in solidarity with the victims of racial violence in this country.

But they also inspired an intense, militaristic backlash. In late June, President Trump deployed national guard to Washington DC, ostensibly to protect the national monuments and other areas of the city. I went downtown shortly after the deployment and saw how my city was transformed: armored trucks blocking off roads, armed guards patrolling the streets and manning the perimeter of churches and parks. On YouTube live later that night I saw guards tear gassing my fellow citizens and helicopters stalking protesters. All of it looked like a scene out of a dystopian sci-fi novel.

That week I wrote to Fr. Bob Mosher in El Paso, who had served in Chile during the dictatorship. I needed help processing what was happening to my city. [He wrote back](#):

“I think about the Columban history in Chile whenever I hear a helicopter overhead. Helicopters create a deep uneasiness and a constant reminder of the militarization at the border, making us feel like prisoners in our own city, watched and threatened. ... Our police these days seem to be targeting certain groups of demonstrating clergy as well as journalists in the same, selective way [they did in Chile] as if the authorities wanted to send a message to our faith communities and news organizations.”

Columbans have 100+ years of experience working in countries torn apart by military might. In our [statement](#) on peace and demilitarization, we write that “militarism is promoted as necessary for defense, security and most nation states regard war as an acceptable tool of foreign [and domestic, I’d add] policy. However our experience and history shows that military might has not brought peace and cannot make up for corrupt and unjust structures and governments.”

The events of this past summer in the US could have unfolded differently. Instead of playing the tough guy, the President could have listened to the black community with an open heart. Instead of sending in troops and trucks, the President could have encouraged legislative changes. “Put your sword away, for those who live by the sword will die by the sword” (Mt 26: 52). Militarism does not keep us safe. It does not create justice. If the solution to a social problem requires troops and guns, then it is not a solution at all.



Excerpts from the Society's Statement on Peace & Demilitarization

"We choose to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence that reflects an inner well-being, just social and economic structures, active non-violence in the face of oppression, and a cosmic Christ-like peace that fosters a sense of inter-connectedness and solidarity with all living things and with the Earth."

Violence of Poverty

"Poverty is a form of violence against the dignity of the human person. It restricts the possibilities for total human development. Economic prosperity for some has meant more and deeper poverty for many."

Violence against God's Creation

"Destroying the Earth tears at the fabric of peace. Violence done to the Earth itself is a part of war whether through habitat destruction or extraction of the Earth's resources for materials to produce weapons and technology used in war."

We are Advocates

"We are committed to working for structural change as part of an integrated strategy for addressing the root causes of violence, economic and environmental injustice. We see the structural causes and systematic impact that policies of war, free trade, environmental over-consumption have on communities and the natural world."

We Practice Nonviolence

"Nonviolence is based on the inviolability of the human person. It calls for a life of action; assertive imaginative, systematic, reemptive action. This action is aimed at uprooting injustice and eventually bringing about reconciliation."

You can read the full statement [here](#).

Upcoming JPIC Days of Prayer & Action

- **Dec 18: International Day for Migrants**
- **Jan 1:** World Day for Peace
- **Feb 1-7:** World Interfaith Harmony Week
- **Mar 22:** World Water Day
- **Apr 22:** Earth Day

Upcoming Newsletters and Feedback

This is the fourth and final JPIC newsletter of 2020. We started the newsletter this year, born out of the feedback from the last JPIC Communications Consultation in August 2019.

We are grateful for your readership this year!

We would also be grateful if you could take five minutes to fill out [this survey](#), which will help us improve JPIC communications for 2021!

2021's newsletters and themes will be based off the feedback we receive from the survey and will be announced in the new year.

January 19 | 9 am Philippines
Asia-Pacific Session

January 26, 8pm Philippines
Americas-Europe Session

Deep Journey in to Laudato Si': A contemplative workshop

Please join us for a 2.5hr session led by JPIC team members including John Din.

Designed to awaken the dreamer in all of us, this workshop will surely be a moment for us to share in nurturing our personal and communal commitment to an ecological vocation and ongoing conversion.

RSVP: Amy Echeverria, amywe@columban.org



To Reconcile the Nations and to Heal the Earth

by Scott Wright, USA

"I felt a duty to come here as a pilgrim of peace, to stand in silent prayer, to recall the innocent victims of such violence, and to bear in my heart the prayers and yearnings of the men and women of our time, especially the young, who long for peace, who work for peace and who sacrifice themselves for peace."

-Pope Francis, on his November 2019 visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki

On January 22, 2021, the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will go into effect. One hundred twenty-two nations, including the Vatican, signed the historic treaty in 2017, and in October of this year, the necessary fifty nations needed to implement it ratified the treaty. It was a moving testament to the solidarity of the global community, and the global consensus of peoples of the world, 75 years after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to rid the earth of nuclear weapons. However, not one of the nine nuclear nations, including the United States, signed the treaty. We must demand that they do so.

On the day the treaty was signed in 2017, Pope Francis addressed the nations gathered: "We

must commit ourselves to a world without nuclear weapons ... especially when we consider the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would follow from any use of nuclear weapons ... and the waste of resources spent on nuclear issues for military purposes."

At his historic visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki two years later, he condemned both the use and the possession of nuclear weapons by any state as "immoral." In Nagasaki, he said that a world free of nuclear weapons is "the aspiration of millions of men and women everywhere," as he called for a concerted effort of individuals, religious communities and civil society, and the nine nations which possess nuclear weapons, to build the necessary mutual trust necessary to abolish them.

His words, and his witness in the presence of survivors of the first and only atomic bombings 75 years ago that instantly killed 210,000 people, remind us of the gravity of the situation.

According to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), winner of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, a limited nuclear war today would likely kill 250 million people, and an all-out war would end life on earth as we know it. In addition to the catastrophic number of deaths, chronic illness and genetic damage,

a nuclear war would also severely disrupt the climate and agricultural production, resulting in widespread famine.

On his trip to Japan, Pope Francis also spoke to the survivors of the 2011 Fukushima triple disaster in Japan, when the country was hit by a devastating mega-earthquake, a tsunami, and the meltdown of the nuclear reactor at the Daiichi Nuclear Power Station in Fukushima. As of March 1, 2018, the death toll was 15,895 across Japan, with an additional 2,539 people unaccounted for and another 62 persons who remain unidentified.

Speaking to survivors in Tokyo, Pope Francis called for the abolition of nuclear facilities, echoing the voice of the local bishops: "This involves, as my brother bishops in Japan have emphasized, concern about use of nuclear power," he said. "For that reason, they have called for the abolition of nuclear power plants."

One year ago, on January 23, 2020, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists made a crucial announcement: "The Doomsday Clock now stands as 100 seconds to midnight, the most dangerous situation that humanity has ever faced. Now is the time to come together - to unite and to act." Founded in 1945 by scientists who worked on the Manhattan Project to develop nuclear weapons, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists created the Doomsday Clock to alert humankind to the danger of nuclear war - and now climate change:

"Humanity continues to face two simultaneous existential dangers - nuclear war and climate

change - that are compounded by a threat multiplier, cyber-enabled information warfare, that undercuts society's ability to respond. The international security situation is dire, not just because these threats exist, but because world leaders have allowed the international political infrastructure for managing them to erode." (Closer than Ever: It is 100 Seconds to Midnight - Bulletin of Atomic Scientists)

The Witness of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

Columban missionaries first arrived in Japan in 1948, three years after the atomic bombings. Since that time, Columbans have accompanied the people of Japan in their grieving and healing. Japan, unlike any other nation in the world, knows intimately the grave impacts of nuclear weapons, and that grief is now compounded by the effects on both its people and the environment, by the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster in 2011.

"From our missionary experience in Japan and in fifteen other countries, including four of the eight nations that currently possess nuclear weapons, the Missionary Society of St. Columban adds its voice to the call for abolition of nuclear weapons and nuclear power, echoing the concerns of Pope Francis."

-Scott Wright, USA

From our missionary experience in Japan and in fifteen other countries, including four of the eight nations that currently possess nuclear weapons, the Missionary Society of St. Columban adds its voice to the call for abolition of nuclear weapons and nuclear power, echoing the concerns of Pope Francis.

As Columbans, we are sent by Christ as disciples, to be signs and instruments of God's universal communion in a world of conflict and division. A culture of violence has evolved. The global system of which we are a part is unsustainable and must be changed radically by all people of

goodwill. (2018 Columban General Assembly)

Our understanding of Christian Discipleship leads us to condemn in strongest terms defense policies that every day make life more insecure. The most blatant of these are present policies of nuclear armament which threaten all life. These policies are themselves a form of killing since they consume resources desperately needed to meet basic human needs. (1982 Columban General Assembly)

Because of our presence in many countries in the world, we both share the anguish of people who have already suffered from the use of nuclear weapons and experience the despair of the many who see their hopes frustrated by the misappropriation of the world's resources. Such experience gives rise to an obligation in conscience.

John Paul II, speaking in Hiroshima, said: "From now on it is only through a conscious choice and through a deliberate policy that humanity can survive." The importance of this issue demands from each of us study, prayer, and supportive action. We must be actively involved with those who raise their voices in protest on this crucial issue of our times because it is at the heart of what it means to defend life and protect creation, now and for future generations.



"For a Christmas without Herods"

Fr. Denny O'Mara's Christmas card still speaks to us today

On December 28, three days after Christmas, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Innocents. The Holy Innocents were the children who were killed by Herod in his bid to get rid of Jesus. These unnumbered children were killed because one political ruler was afraid that Jesus' coming reign of peace and justice would diminish his own power.

While advocating against torture in Chile under the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, Fr. Denny O'Mara used the Holy Innocents as a metaphor for those tortured by the government. He designed this Christmas card: "For a Christmas without the Herods and a new year without torurers," we pray.



“We Follow His Example”

by Fr. Bob Mosher, USA

When Father Dennis O’Mara was arrested for the fifth time along with other members of the Sebastian Acevedo Movement Against Torture for handing out Christmas cards after Sunday Mass at a Catholic church in the rich area of Chile’s capital, Santiago, we were in summertime temperatures. This meant that summer school for the teachers and supervisors of sacramental programs in Catholic parishes throughout the country would soon begin, in January, before February’s vacation period.

The military regime of Augusto Pinochet found priests like Father Dennis and lay leaders committed to Church programs a danger to the nation’s security, and actually issued a decree of expulsion for Father Dennis that said precisely as much.

They had only contempt for the country’s traditional democratic system, which allowed the Socialist leader, Dr. Salvador Allende, to become president in 1970. Although he was only halfway through his six-year term at the time, Pinochet led the military coup d’état that violently imposed a dictatorship on September 11th, 1973.

The Church’s bishops began to condemn the human rights abuses that began to explode everywhere, and in every form--arbitrary arrests at night, exile, executions and disappearances of thousands, and torture on a daily, widespread basis at the interrogation centers established and run throughout the country by the secret police.

When foreign priests like Father Dennis were arrested for participating in non-violent protests, police would often shout at them, “Why don’t you go back to your own country, and protest there?” I remember thinking at the time that they would have a point, if the U.S. government ever treated people the way the Pinochet regime treated their people.

Three decades later, their words come back to haunt me. As U.S. military hardware and personnel are deployed in increasing numbers at the U.S.-Mexico border, where my present assignment is, I knew that I was morally obliged

to be consistent in my stance of faith-inspired opposition to the abuse of basic human rights to bodily security, due process and asylum from danger, as, incredibly, the pigeons that the U.S. government sent to Latin America and other parts of the world came home to roost.

The Nixon-Kissinger administration in the U.S. (1969-1974) interfered in the internal democratic processes of many

countries, acting on the “National Security” theory that the spread of Soviet-supported Communism in developing countries could only be stopped by military dictatorships installed by, or with the aid of U.S. government agencies and military forces. Other U.S. administrations also applied this theory in brutal ways throughout the 20th century, but Chile is a classic case.

National security is now again invoked as legitimizing the use of Department of Homeland Security agencies and the U.S. military to go down the same road of resolving

“The militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border assumes the same characteristics as the militarization of Chile, and provides us with the same obligations, as followers of Jesus Christ, to put love of God and of neighbor into the practice of solidarity with the victims of violence.”

-Fr. Bob Mosher, USA

social issues like the need for reform of the U.S. immigration system with highly developed, increasingly harmful weapons, detention camps, and even widespread mistreatment of vulnerable people that could also be termed torture. The closing of our borders to thousands of families fleeing violence and starvation, the systematic separation of very young children from their parents, the violent abuse detainees are subjected to in for-profit migrant detention camps throughout the U.S. and even the deaths of people while in detention all give evidence of Pinochet-grade mistreatment in our own country. And now, it is our turn to peacefully protest the dictatorship-like tendencies of our own government, as it grows in violence and excessive military characteristics.

Since arriving in El Paso in 2011, nothing has angered me as much as the militarization of the border, because of its shocking clarity and shameless manifestations. I have often conducted visiting groups from faith communities or university service programs up the stairs of a local seasonal farmworker center near the facilities of the Customs and Border Police (CBP), at one of the bridges linking Juarez, Mexico, with the U.S., in order to view over the walls the crowds of asylum-seeking families and individuals being processed for days at a time, forced to stand in the open-air pens of the facility with no protection from the desert sun. The men often removed their shirts to wrap them on their heads, for protection. The sight is astounding, and sickening--Has the U.S. become such a poor country that we cannot afford to treat people with dignity? Are we actually coming to look like some sort of barbaric society we read about in news items or reports? Uniformed personnel, both from Homeland Security and the U.S. Army, wander about, heavy weapons slung on their backs, helmets on their heads. Spools of razor-wire and cement barriers that can be moved by forklifts line the side of the bridge's traffic lanes, ready to shut access off out of fear of huge caravans forcing their way into the U.S., something that is more fiction than reality. I once heard testimony from members of a family who underwent a SWAT-like raid of

a family home in El Paso, which took place to spectacularly "take down" the father, an undocumented migrant who has worked steadily for his family for years, paying taxes and receiving nothing from social welfare programs. This raid had one team member, suited up like the others in bullet-proof apparel and helmets, recording the shouting and the breaking into the house, and the tackling the undocumented person on the front lawn, in front of his screaming children, in order to provide footage for a police-focused reality-television program. There is no question for me that many security people deployed at the U.S.-Mexico border feel permitted to act in these ways, and perform in a kind of "bad as we wanna be" freedom that allows them to act with impunity provided by the present U.S. administration. I never could find out where the father ended up, after visiting a downtown county jail where migrants were often taken when the for-profit detention centers were filled. They had no record of him at the front desk. It was exactly like the search for missing relatives that families often asked priests and lawyers to help them look for, back in Pinochet's Chile, after their arrests and takedowns in the middle of the night. I assume he was deported, regardless of any judge's ruling, if there was one.

The militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border assumes the same characteristics as the militarization of Chile, and provides us with the same obligations, as followers of Jesus Christ, to put love of God and of neighbor into the practice of solidarity with the victims of violence, as we work, then as well as now, employing peaceful means of protest and the raising of awareness, to help our society and government to become more humanized and respectful of basic human dignity. We follow Father Dennis' example.



Voices Praying for Peace

Prepared by Fr. Kurt Pala, Myanmar

Lord of the Earth,
Protect us, lead us to peace
Have mercy on those countries
destroyed by war

Change weapons to spades,
Change bombs to bread,
Get rid of the greed in us

Lord of Peace,
All this time you listened to our prayers
Give peace to those who have suffered
Seeking for peace

Lord, unite those separated,
Give us a light and wisdom,
Stop all conflicts,
Let the world be at peace.
Translated by: Athanasius Aung San La

These are the words of a hymn written by Bishop Francis Daw Tang, the local bishop of the Diocese of Myitkyina. The diocese is home to a large number of internally-displaced persons since 9 June 2011, when a 17-year cease-fire between the Burmese government and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) broke down. At every Mass, this hymn is sang by the faithful after communion - a people longing for justice and peace. The title of the song is "Simsa Lam A Kyu Hpyi Nsen" which can be translated as "A Voice Praying for Peace." The Diocese of Myitkyina is located in the northernmost state of Kachin in Myanmar. The Kachins are one of the eight ethnic groups recognized by the Burmese government.

In February 12, 1947 a gathering was held in Panglong, Shan State of the members of the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma and representatives of the Shan, Kachin and Chin ethnic groups. They believed that freedom will be more achieved quickly if the Shans, the Kachins and the Chins work with the Burmese government. The Panglong

Agreement was signed by the representatives and the Burmese government. But up to this day the agreement has not been implemented. Myanmar recently conducted its national election to elect new members of its lower and upper legislative houses. We recently facilitated an online Zoom English conversation entitled "Why YOUth need to vote?" The young people explained that it will give them the opportunity - to change the 2008 constitution. One youth commented that true democratic power is in the people not in the elected person or authority. Another youth added that if we expect our lives to become better, we need to choose the right party or people to look after our country and protect our human rights. Among the many issues the young people highlighted are education and health system, environmental issues and the 2008 Constitution. They also asserted that the government should focus on the peace process with ethnic groups and address the consequences of the war.

Mr. Yan Naing (a former Buddhist monk), one of the facilitators of the online conversation commented that most young people are not interested in socio-political issues. He explained that in the last decade the government had persecuted those who are critical of the government or are advocating for human rights. Consequently fearful of the government, parents taught their children not to engage in politics. He later appealed to the young people that "...now we have gained some sort of freedom, let us learn us about politics and engage with in the public life." He added "...engage and vote, raise your voices. Don't be quiet. We have been quiet and silent for six decades. It is more than enough. Engage and vote!" Yan motivated the young people. The voices of children and young people are important and they should be heard in the peace process.

The government of Myanmar is a hybrid of civil and military power. Of the 664 plus total seats for both higher and lower legislative houses 498 seats are elected while 166 seats are appointed from the military by the Commander-in-Chief.

But the election this month was a victory for the National League for Democracy party which has secured 399 placing the party at a stronger position. Then a move first of its kind, NLD reached out to 48 ethnic political parties including those from Kachin state - calling on them to join the NLD in building a democratic federal union. The NLD spokesperson commented that "Together they could work effectively for ethnic affairs and ending civil war." This is a great development for the peace process.



Figure 1A | The geography of natural resource wealth.



Figure 1B | The geography of active armed conflict in Myanmar.

in vulnerable groups like young children and youth. There has been an increased in drug addiction and alcoholism among young people. Displaced children and youth have little access to health and education services. Many are orphaned or abandoned.

Kevin Woods explained that the Figures 1a and 1b (above) shows where the country's natural resource wealth and ethnic minority populated areas are located. You will notice that where the natural resources are, conflicts also exist:

The causes and consequences of war are far and wide and interconnected. Conflicts are linked to the desire of many ethnic groups for self-governance and self-identification. But a report in 2019, "Natural resource governance reform and the peace process in Myanmar," asserted that "Natural resources, including timber, gems, oil and gas, and hydro-power, are the mainstay of Myanmar's economy, generating billions of dollars each year. They are also inextricably linked to Myanmar's history of armed conflict, in which parties to the conflict have fought (and in many cases, still fight) over the right to control and benefit from these valuable resources, many of which are located in or transported through conflict-affected territories." Just distribution of wealth and natural resources is an important component of the peace process.

The impact of war is very strong and amplified

- Rakhine State: Southeast Asia's largest oil and gas deposits ring the Bay of Bengal along the coast in the southwest;
- Southeast and South (Kayin and Mon States and Tanintharyi Region): agribusiness concessions, forests, hydropower, and minerals are located along the Thailand border where cease res have held so far this decade; and,
- Kachin State and North Shan State: Within China's orbit, large-scale hydropower dams, forests, agribusiness concessions, gems, and minerals are still (to varying degrees) plentiful in the north where fighting resumed this decade.

St. Joseph Camp is one of the many IDP camps around the diocese. It is under the care of the parish where I am currently attached and working. Together with the parish youth leaders we visited and helped the youth in the camp

organize their own committee. We assisted them in selecting their own leaders. Within this month we hope to start a program for the youth that includes Basic English and entrepreneurial classes. Three student volunteer teachers from the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM) will help in teaching English. We also provided some sports equipment and a guitar for the youth.

The peace - process in Myanmar is an ongoing journey at many different levels and with many different peoples. And it will take time. And I believe peace education and dialogue are important in the process. We participate in interfaith dialogue communities like Religious for Peace - Myitkyina to work with individuals of other faith traditions. Because we need more voices not only Catholic or Christians praying for peace but also voices that can lead to actions of peace.

Pope Francis released a new social encyclical, "Fratelli Tutti, on Fraternity and Social Friendship," where he calls all people of goodwill to care for one another as brothers and sisters and encourage everyone to not lose hope of making the world a better place. He said that "A worldwide tragedy like the Covid-19 pandemic momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person's problems are the problems of all," the pope explained Central in Fratelli Tutti is Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan, "Who is my neighbour?"

And so we will continue to sing and pray for peace until weapons are made into spades, until bombs are made into bread and greed is taken out of ourselves.



What does Peace mean to you?

Peace is a place where there is no noise and no movement. Don't also forget that peace is in your heart. It is love. Peace is the limit of light and dark.

A child who is in a dark situation is scared and adult who is in dark situation is also scared of it. They should work together hand in hand. We are ethnic and believe in God. If we are united it is not very difficult to become a peaceful country.

The best way is we should try to become a good faithful believers. If we have peace, even with many difficulties and dangers - we can pass from these situations. All people have to become educated and good citizens.

Jacinta Doi Ling, 23 years old and is a 3rd year university student (BA Burmese). She has lived in St. Joseph IDP Camp for the last nine years. She is the newly elected youth committee president.

"Simsa ai Lam Ahkyu Pyi ai Nsen"



The Myanmar team recorded a video of some children at St. Joseph's camp singing a song about peace. Watch the [video here](#).

"E na Komunio" (In Communion)

by Marjorie Engcoy, Fiji



This is an oil painting made by Marjorie Engcoy in January 2016 called "E na Komunio" (In Communion).

From Marjorie: "It is the act of sharing a bowl of grog. Here in Fiji in the old days, this is a peaceful way to mend community discord. At present, this is still used to discuss community or family issues peacefully, commonly known as the "conversation around the bowl of grog". The background is shared by two cultures: the Fijian culture and my culture--different but co-exists."

Lessons from the Christmas Truce

by Ellen Teague, UK

It was the first Christmas of the First World War when an unofficial ceasefire took place on the Western Front. The sounds of rifles firing and shells exploding faded in a number of places, as soldiers on both sides of the conflict emerged from the trenches and shared gestures of goodwill. It happened when each side realised that some of the Christmas carols they were singing had the same melody. They sang back and forth and finally dared to lay down their guns, leave the safety of their trenches and extend a hand of friendship, share cigarettes and chocolate, play a game of football and bury their dead. The military leaders and indeed the local Church leaders did not approve of what happened. After 1914, the High Commands on the German and Allied sides prevented any truces on a similar scale happening again.

Yet, I feel it is important to remember this truce. Just under four years later my maternal grandmother's brother John was killed of "wounds and gas" on 15 October 1918. He had been serving Mass in the trenches as poison gas wafted onto the congregation, closely followed by German soldiers with bayonets. John was one of the world's first victims of chemical warfare, though they were banned even then. I have visited his war grave in Northern France twice over the years. Granny never made it, but even 50 years later in the late 1960s she would tear-up talking about him and I would feel the full horror of the grief war brings. That has never left me.

What can we learn from the Christmas Truce of 1914? It halted however briefly the juggernaut of war, gave the men an insight they were never to forget, and made some think twice about the nationally inspired animosities to which they were expected to subscribe. It was an astonishing event that highlighted all the best qualities of the human spirit and the openness to see the humanity of "enemies". It also demonstrated the importance of a leap of faith to trust, to leave the safety of their trenches, without being sure it would pay off. Sometimes risks are necessary

for peacemaking. Perhaps one day our Church will evolve into a Peace Church, as the Quakers and the Mennonites have done.

Columbans are member of Pax Christi International, which was born out of the Second World War 75 years ago and promotes peace education and alternatives to war. It highlights Britain's role as a leading player in arms trading which fuels current wars, and the dead civilians who comprise at least 80 per cent of the casualties of modern war. Conflicts these days carry massive social, economic and environmental costs. Indeed, an escalating nuclear conflagration could destroy life on the planet as we know it.

Columbans in Britain always support London's annual commemoration in May of conscientious objectors. Nearly 80 of them from the First World War died in prison or very soon after release. Columbans have a positive vision and a long-term perspective on what true security really is - and it includes climate stability and biodiversity protection. Members of the JPIC team have been involved in workshops with children creating peace gardens and exploring techniques for reconciliation based on the biblical story of Esau and Jacob in a Pax Christi Peace icon. Children don't have to be encouraged to resign themselves to a world blighted by war.

The Great War was fought as the "war to end all wars" but we see today innocent people dying in conflict in the Middle East, Syria, northern Iraq and other countries.

At Christmas we turn our attention to the Palestinian town of Bethlehem, where the Prince of Peace was born, but even here conflict exacerbates the coronavirus and undermines peace. The little town is surrounded by an apartheid wall. But, as we learn from the wartime Christmas truce in 1914, Christmas miracles are possible.





Peace and Nonviolence in China

by Fr. Dan Troy, China

China is not engaged in any international armed conflict at this time of its history. However, it has ongoing territorial disputes with Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Singapore, Brunei, Nepal, Bhutan, Laos, Mongolia, and Myanmar. This long list covers conflicting claims about land and maritime borders, the latter covering a vast area of the South China Sea.

An example of the complexities around diplomatic engagement on these issues is seen in China's rejection of a July 2016 ruling by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which ruled against China's maritime claims on territory near the coastline of the Philippines. China insists that disputes of this kind should be resolved bilaterally by the countries that have claims on territory. Such an approach would surely give the advantage to the more powerful country.

In June 2020 conflict erupted among opposing troops in the border area known as the Galwan Valley where there is a territorial disagreement between China and India. No shots were fired in the incident but 20 Indian troops lost their lives in the physical engagement. An indication of how important this territory is perceived

by China can be gauged by the fact that the high altitude border has between 200,000 to 300,000 of its troops stationed there. India has 225,000 troops protecting its interests in the area.

In Hong Kong the ongoing difference of views between the Chinese government and the citizens of the city highlights another setting where a simmering tension has the potential to become even more complicated during the next couple of years.

China's annual military budget of US\$261 billion is the second largest in the world. In a country where many children still struggle to get a proper education, the spending of such vast sums of money obviously raises questions about the appropriate use of resources.

The ability of China to control the COVID-19 outbreak during a strict eleven week period of restrictions at the beginning of the year was huge achievement. Since the main restrictions were removed in mid-April, there has been no second wave of infections. One result of this achievement is that it seems to have boosted the confidence of the Chinese government in a way that affirms its undertaking of large scale projects. Hopefully such new found confidence will not be expressed in any military undertakings.

In recent years vast efforts have been made in China to promote 12 core values of Chinese socialism. These values are memorized by school children and can also be seen in a huge variety of public settings, including public transport. Two of these core values are harmony and justice. As China continues to have a bigger influence in the world, a style of diplomacy that believes in real harmony and justice would be the preferred approach for the benefit of all in this part of the world.



Peace Education with young people and educators in Britain

by James Trewby & Ellen Teague, Britain

When I started working for the Columbans I was so encouraged by the words “partnership is our way of being on mission” (from ‘Called to Communion’). What a sensible and life-giving approach, in a world where so many organisations are caught up in ‘branding’ and ‘market-share’! One extremely fruitful partnership has been our active membership of the Peace Education Network, a national network that brings together people and organisations committed to education for peace.

Through regular meetings and ‘skill-shares’ we support one another and often find creative ways to collaborate. Amongst other things it has led to young people running around the gardens at St Columban’s with paper kites as part of a workshop on [‘Fly Kites Not Drones’](#), training for hundreds of teachers exploring the Christian vocation to peace-making, sessions with [Veterans for Peace](#), and a [resource pack](#) of assemblies and activities for exploring peace themes with children aged 5 to 11.

Of all the members of the Peace Education Network, by far our most regular co-conspirators have been the Schools and Youth Education Officers from Pax Christi. In normal times we have worked together in schools, at festivals, youth ministry conferences and retreats. COVID has forced us to try something new - during our first lockdown, a group of teachers, heads and youth ministers gathered together faithfully online on Tuesday evenings for a programme run jointly by Pax Christi and the Columbans.

Over 2 months we explored faith in action through a mixture of discussion, special guests, reading, film, prayer and reflection. Sessions included an encounter with Sr Katrina Alton CSJP, a peace and climate activist, a discussion about ‘decolonising the curriculum’, and watching and sharing our reactions to the

documentary 'War School' highlighting military engagement in the British education system. A second iteration of this programme is planned for the new year.



Columbans launch schools media competition to 'End Racism'

Columbans in Britain have launched the annual schools [media competition](#), focusing on addressing the violence of racism. This year the theme is 'Let's Create A World Without Racism' and is open to students aged 14-18 years old. The objective is to encourage them to use their media skills to look at a topical issue which is relevant to society today and resonates with Catholic Social Teaching.

The competition is open for writing and image entries until 20 February 2021 and winners will be announced on 15 March 2021. Two separate competitions will be judged, one for students in Ireland and one in Britain and high-profile judges from the world of journalism have been secured.



A Broken People - The Consequence of War

by Peter Zau Mai, Myanmar

The conflict between the KIA and the government has started over ten years ago - a civil war broke out in the Kachin state. The civilians are the victims of this war. They have been affected badly not only by the war but by the consequences of war - displacement of people and drug/substance abuse. Many village men were forced to serve as soldiers in the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) front lines. Some died in the fighting and some survived but lose their legs, arms or hands. The number of widows and orphans increased. Children had to leave schools and families are separated.

The village men became jobless and hopeless. It became difficult to support their families because they have to be in the battle front lines all the time. Many of the village men both young and old became drug-dependent and alcoholic. Most of the KIA controlled-areas are also influenced by Chinese businessmen. Many villagers had to convert their farmlands like rice fields to sugar cane farms that are directly controlled by Chinese private companies who also dictate the price and control all the farm inputs like chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Illegal drugs markets appeared like normal small shops near the Chinese border fence very close to the government control areas. But the government is not doing anything to stop or control them. Access to these drugs is easy and cheap. Illegal drugs and its proliferation is like a cold war between KIA and the Burmese government. But sadly the victims of this cold war are the civilians.

My own family is a victim of this civil war and cold war. My father was addicted to heroin for nearly ten years. And when he decided to give up heroin he became alcoholic. He passed away due to health complications from substance and alcohol abuse at the age of 55 years old in 2019.

My mom was left with 8 children and my grandparents. I feel very sorry for my mom.

I have four uncles. Two of them got married and the other two served in the Kachin Independent Army during the civil war. Now they are drug-dependent and alcoholic. I learned it was the only way to escape from serving the KIA by using drugs and alcohol. They are sent back home.

Children at the St. Joseph IDP camp



The sad thing was my grandparents have to look after my uncles' children and wives. The last time I saw my uncles they were very skinny and sickly from taking heroin and drinking too much alcohol.

The consequences of war - broken people and families. It made their parents cry a lot. It destroyed their children's dreams and brought their families deeper into poverty.

The war is not directly killing the Kachin people. Many men are dying every year in Kachin state not because of the war but because of the consequences of using drugs or working in the jade and gold mining fields of Hpakant. There are very few job opportunities for the youth even if they have university degrees. Many Kachin youth grew up from the poor families.

Poverty, the lack of education opportunities and the illegal drugs trade is a big challenge Kachin families have to face everyday. Uncertainty of the future, hopelessness and helplessness has led many young people to turn to drugs.

Drug users are also increasingly getting young and younger. It was reported in the local news that near a high school compound, in Tune Pin Tar quarter, in Myiktyina, over 60 drug used syringes have been thrown carelessly near the fence of the school. Every drug is a poison that kills not only the person using drugs but everyone around the person.

Peter Zau Mai, is a Columban student in formation from Myanmar. He was bound for Manila to join the formation program but the pandemic has not allowed him to travel. He is from a town called Lweje close to the Chinese border. He is currently continuing to study English in preparation to join the Manila Columban formation.





Days of Peace and Nonviolence

by Pat Cunningham, Korea

Columban missionaries endorse and support the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI) and its work to promote the power of nonviolence and peoples struggles for peace around the world. It was particularly pleasing to be able to participate in the Nonviolence Days of Action (21 September-2 October 2020) and join CNI and Pax Christi in celebrating the power of nonviolence through study, action and prayer. I recently saw a banner with the striking reminder to all humanity that if we refrain from violence against creation, mother nature in her wonderful generosity will provide all living things with shelter, food, water and oxygen to ensure a flourishing and sustainable life-the key is our interconnectedness and interdependence. To paraphrase Martin Luther King I believe we have come to a critical juncture in our journey of awareness of a stark choice that exists between nonviolence and nonexistence.

Recently I had the opportunity with a number of Columban colleagues to join Fr. Mun Jeong Hyen, an activist priest and other peacemakers in participating in the early morning 100 bows for the life and peace of Gangjeong-Fr Mun likes to refer to the daily bows as his 'morning prayer'. Each of the 100 bows are basically

a solemn vow and promise to engage in nonviolent resistance against the destruction of the environment and ongoing militarization of the island of Jeju. While the 100 bows represent a challenge to my creaking bones I always feel refreshed and somewhat revitalized with the knowledge that all the participants are stubborn in declaring a resounding no to war preparations.

The UN Secretary General together with Pope Francis have been vocal in calling for a de-escalation of military build-up during the Covid pandemic but apparently these calls have fallen on deaf ears. The Gangjeong community have joined calls seeking a suspension of RIMPAC 2020 in Hawaii, the bi-annual war exercise where ROK has taken a leading role this year in leading 10 countries amassing a huge toll on marine life while ratcheting up tensions in the region. Choi Sung-Hee writes in a recent issue of Gangjeong Village Story that the recent ROK-US military exercises together with RIMPAC are an integral part of the 'US Indo-Pacific domination strategy targeting North Korea and China...and are in violation of '..inter Korea summit declarations and DPRK-US summit in 2018. These war preparations have continued in violation of calls for a de-escalation in tensions in the South China Sea. given the Covid pandemic and government efforts around the world to deal with the crisis.

Gangjeong has become a focal point of peace learning and nonviolent resistance for many peace activists and religious alike who are working to move beyond militarism and preparations for war and seek a sustainable future for all God's creation.

We lament the monstrosity that is the Gangjeong naval base and the enormous waste of resources that ongoing war preparations represent and celebrate the many years of struggle and power of nonviolence in promoting a culture of life and peace in Gangjeong. The destruction of the coastline and sacred Gureombi rock and many years of state violence inflicted on villagers and peace activists continues to engender feelings of anger and pain. However during these days of Advent we celebrate the power and effectiveness of nonviolence and the futility of war preparations in bringing true and meaningful human security.



Martial Mining

by Ellen Teague, UK

In November, Columbans supported the launch of the London Mining Network's latest report, '[Martial Mining](#)', which highlights the links between mining, the international arms trade, and warfare. From the minerals needed to produce weapons to the military force needed to secure and police mines themselves, the report spotlights large-scale mining as a militarised process. Around 50 people joined in on 6 November, some of them Catholic religious who are members of the London Mining Network and who have had experience of the destruction of large-scale mining. The Columbans have long been involved in highlighting destructive mining in the Philippines.

The date was the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict. Though humanity has always counted its war casualties in terms of dead and wounded soldiers and civilians, destroyed cities and livelihoods, the environment has often remained the unpublicised victim of war. Water wells have been polluted, crops torched, forests cut down, soils poisoned, and animals killed to gain military advantage. Furthermore, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has found that over the last 60 years, at least 40 percent of all internal conflicts have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources, whether timber, diamonds, gold and oil, or fertile land and water. Destruction of land, water and life has been resisted from the start by local communities, such as Glencore's plunder of Congo's cobalt, and Rio Tinto titanium mining in Madagascar. Profits come back to London-based or London-financed mining companies, with little benefit to local peoples. British arms sales and training then often support repression in the affected countries. There were calls for an international law of ecocide.





Columban Message of Peace and Nonviolence On the 75th Anniversary of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima & Nagasaki

2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings by the United States of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9). By the end of the year, 1945, more than 210,000 people, mainly civilians, were dead. Those surviving the bombings (Hibakusha) and their children continue to suffer the physical and psychological impacts of the bombing and radiation.

Pope Francis, on his visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2019, issued an urgent plea to the world:

"Here, in an incandescent burst of lightning and fire, so many men and women, so many dreams and hopes, disappeared, leaving behind only shadows and silence ... The possession of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction is not the answer to one of the deepest longings of the human heart for security, peace and stability ... In a world where millions of children and families live in inhumane conditions, the money that is squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading,

maintenance and sale of ever more destructive weapons are an affront crying out to heaven."

On this 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings, the Missionary Society of St. Columban reaffirms the commitment we made at the height of the Cold War when we declared at our 1982 General Assembly:

"Our understanding of Christian Discipleship leads us to condemn in strongest terms defense policies that every day make life more insecure. The most blatant of these are present policies of nuclear armament which threaten all life. These policies are themselves a form of killing since they consume resources desperately needed to meet basic human needs."

As Columbans, we express our deep desire and hope for healing and reconciliation among and within nations, and we urge political and civic leaders of every nation to:

- Call for abolishing nuclear weapons, their production, possession, testing and use;
- Offer public apologies for past and present war crimes on anniversaries like this; and
- Promote nonviolence as the most effective means to global security and peace.
-

Today, our missionary presence in many countries in the world continues to bring us in to relationship with people and their anguish who have already suffered from the use of nuclear weapons, and the anxiety of those who see their hopes frustrated by the misappropriation of the world's resources.

As members of Pax Christi International-Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and local Pax Christi chapters throughout the world, we join millions of Catholics calling for an abolition to nuclear weapons. We affirm, too, our commitment to active nonviolence as a Gospel path to conversion, as we continue the work for peace and reconciliation among the nations and peoples of the earth.

In closing, we offer this prayer,

Creator God,

Your world is precious but human folly threatens its very existence.

We pray for those whose lives have been destroyed by nuclear weapons and nuclear testing.

We pray for those denied the essentials of life when money is squandered on nuclear weapons production.

We pray for the politicians, scientists and militaries responsible for the manufacture, build-up and deployment of nuclear weapons, that they may recognize another way for peace is possible.

We pray that our Church will speak to the world with clarity and wisdom and work with world leaders to ban the development, possession and use of nuclear weapons.

With Pope Francis, we commit ourselves to work for a world without nuclear weapons.

We pray in hope for a world built on just relations and cooperation among people who wish to live in peaceful co-existence for generations to come. Amen.

What does Peace mean to you?

Peace is understanding each other. There is no war, no argument and no noise. There is equity and safety. If someone wants something the person can get it. No need to worry about health and food. Everything is okay. It is peace.

Peace is very important for everyone. In a family if there is no peace, there is no love - it is not a family. In a relationship it is not only love but also peace that is important.

We all know about peace. It is just one word. But it is very difficult to be peaceful. Because of war many people have died in the battlefield. Nobody wants to die by gunshot. Many women have become widows. They are left with their children. Many children were left by their parents. They became orphans. They didn't have chance to call their Mom or Dad.

Now who will support these children - for their future? They didn't have any fault but now they are orphans. Why did their parents have to die in the war? They are always wishing for their parents. These are all problems the government must solve. We hope and pray to God to become a peaceful country.

Maureen Hka Mai, 22 years old, has lived in St. Joseph IDP for the last three years but had also lived for many years in another camp. She is a 2nd Year student of the Mandalay Archdiocese Higher Education Center which was started by Fr. Neil Magill, SSC. Now she is teaching 4-7 year old children in the camp.



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