



Pax Scotia

Issue 30

Contents:

Page 2: Barbara Kentish reflects on the vigils for asylum seekers

Page 3: A Czech's eye view of the Ukraine war by Jan Hrdlicka

Page 4: Pax Christi Scotland - event links and information

Fr John Convery sx reflects on Pilgrims for Peace



As I write this short reflection for our Newsletter, I am listening to BBC radio debating the move from the UK government to put further restrictions on its citizens to hold peaceful protests on our streets. It seems if the new legislation is passed you can be arrested even for walking toward a peaceful protest. If intent is now to become a criminal act, then anyone like me or any members of Pax Christi Scotland should start making plans for a wee stretch inside.

I say this because this is how I would describe my small contribution to the journey of PCS. I see myself as merely a pilgrim walking alongside fellow peace activists on a path toward a more peaceful and just world. Along the way others are invited to join us. It can be frustrating, tiring and sometimes soul destroying but nevertheless we journey on because we are convinced by faith that it is the right thing to do.

This small corner of the Pax Christi international community has achieved much these past few years, even with a global pandemic. I suppose it's part of the Scottish DNA: we are small but noisy and effective. As a member of a missionary religious order, I see my involvement in peace activism as coming with the territory. Being called to work on the margins alongside the marginalised, I believe, is at the very core of why congregations such as ours (Xaverians) were founded at the beginning of the last century. I believe that it is at the very core of my ordination vows that I am called to be a peacemaker alongside my brothers and sisters.

Five years ago, I decided to join this pilgrimage and for the past four years I have served as its chaplain. It has been both a humbling and privileged experience. Along the way I have met and worked with some of the most committed people from all walks of life both here in Scotland and from much further afield. We have organised, campaigned and shown a great deal of patience in our peace endeavours. As a result of this patient campaigning, we have grown. Grown in hope and in number and I am totally convinced that with the same endeavour we will continue to grow.

I would suggest one of the secrets of our success is that always at the heart of whatever we do is Faith and a faith expressed through prayer. I remain continually thankful that I may have had the opportunity to contribute to this aspect of our pilgrimage and I cherish each of those moments when we stopped on our journey to reflect and pray together. I have been blessed and humbled by my fellow pilgrims.

I have reached a small detour on the pilgrimage, and I am being asked to continue the journey in the Northwest of England. I take with me the fact that for a period of time I was privileged to be part of the journey of Pax Christi Scotland. Just one word: THANKYOU.

“What you think, you become.

What you feel, you attract.

What you imagine, you create.”

Fr. John Convery sx

Who are the asylum seekers who die on their way to seek sanctuary? Very occasionally, a death will be so shocking that a name hits the headlines - back in 2015, two-year-old Syrian Alan Kurdi's image flashed around the world when his body was washed up on an Aegean beach. But too often, those fleeing conflict die nameless. Here **Barbara Kentish** describes a moving way that the dead are remembered and honoured in a monthly vigil held outside the Home Office - HQ for the Home secretary who refuses to apologise for the discriminatory language she uses for asylum seekers.



Mourning the victims of evil policies...

Barbara Kentish studied Modern Languages, and after volunteering in Uganda, worked in London, first in community and race relations, then teaching in inner city schools. In 'retirement', she became a fieldworker for the Westminster Justice and Peace Commission, supporting parishes with issues such as Fairtrade, refugees and the environment. She is currently involved in the London Catholic Worker and the Notre Dame Refugee Centre. She takes part in the monthly Home Office Vigils to commemorate those who have died seeking sanctuary in Europe and the UK.

Figures Europe

Prefers to Forget

There is a staggering list of people who have died trying to reach a place of safety in Europe, compiled by a Dutch campaigning group, United Against Racism, which was begun in 1993, and consisting of around 100,000 names or numbers, sadly growing each year. It represents an amazing journalistic feat: reporters doggedly gleaning figures from news sources around Europe and beyond – figures that Fortress Europe would prefer to forget.

The London Catholic Worker (LCW), a hospitality group campaigning on justice and peace issues as well as housing asylum seekers, began witnessing outside the Home Office around five or six years ago, by simply reading out the names. They would sing, pray and speak out on the government policies causing these tragedies. During COVID, campaigning went online, but afterwards, Westminster Justice and Peace united with the LCW for a monthly commemoration. Now comprising various groups of Christians, including the ecumenical London

Churches Refugee Fund and several Anglican and Catholic ministers, our email distribution list has grown to around 60, though attendance often hovers around 20.

A talented musician leads our songs – usually a cappella - and many originating from the Iona Wild Goose resources. The main focus is to read the list of those who have perished in the month of the previous year.

In November this ran to 60-70 items, with such entries as:

12th November 2021: *one unknown man of around 20 from Syria died of unknown causes, his body found in a wooded area near Wolka Terechowska, Poland, at the Belarus border (France24/DW/Reuters/Aljazeera/Guardian/MSNcom/AV)*

11th November 2021: *seven unknown people including two women and one man were drowned when their boat crashed on the way to Spain in the estuary of the Oued Cherrat river near Rabat, Morocco. Three were missing and three rescued. (MorWN/Euromed/IOM)*

The list tells of treacherous river crossings between Greece and Turkey, even between France and Spain, of shipwrecks between the Canary Islands from Western Sahara, and this November, the names of the 27 or so people recently shipwrecked off the coast of Calais, let down by two border forces, and of course the thousands dying in the Mediterranean. We pray for the migrants, their families, those offering hospitality, those who carry out



Barbara Kentish

rescues and the government workers implementing such hostile policies. Elsewhere others are similarly praying. In Deal, Folkstone and Calais there were also prayers marking the anniversary of last year's Channel victims.

The security staff and local police accept us, but never join in. We have all lobbied against the Nationality and Borders Act and multiple injustices, while the hostile environment becomes more entrenched.

Praying is not a substitute for campaigning but a way of mourning the victims of evil policies, and asking for the strength and hope to change them.

If anyone wants to organise similar prayers, we are very happy to share our services in advance. It is important to know we are not alone.

Barbara Kentish

* Barbara asked for the words of Brendan Woodhouse's poem *If they were white...* (you will remember this from our *Challenging The Hostile Environment* online event last year), and with Brendan's permission the poem was read at the January vigil. Contact Pax Christi Scotland for details of services.



What the neighbours think: A reflection from the Czech Republic on the war in Ukraine

Jan Hrdlicka is a forestry expert who gained his Masters at Aberdeen University before working as a forest manager in the west of Scotland. He returned to his native Czech Republic to work from 2019 with the Global Change Research Institute there as a specialist in research & development. And then Russia invaded Ukraine and life changed for everyone...

The Russian aggression found me unprepared. It was like returning a hundred years back. I couldn't believe it was happening. My world was shaken. I attended several anti-war/anti-Putin demonstrations. I did a few more things to support Ukraine. At the very beginning I thought that Ukraine would fall quickly. I became more optimistic later on and I was very glad. I was hoping the conflict would end quickly though. However, it seems that Ukraine will have to go through a long war.

At first the support for Ukraine was very, very strong in the Czech Republic. We condemned Putin and Kremlin. We sent arms to Ukraine. We received refugees. We gave refugees special status, accommodation, access to healthcare, and social benefits. Many of them started working days or weeks after their arrival. We accepted their children to schools. Many ordinary people took Ukrainians to their flats or houses. The government supported this too. Ukraine's flag is on most government and municipal buildings. About half a year after the beginning of the attack, the support went down a bit. Some people envied Ukraine's refugees for the rather good conditions they had in the Czech Republic. Some others were worried about the growing costs of the energy bills and the rising prices of everything. However, the support remains strong still.

As far as I know the support of Ukraine is a bit smaller in Slovakia than it is in the Czech Republic. But still the support is prevalent.

Polish people have closer ties with Ukraine historically, culturally and linguistically than we have. And it was very obvious from the support they gave them, too. They accepted several millions of refugees. They did huge humanitarian work. Their support is the strongest among all countries. I have some Polish friends and the news from them was inspiring.

Hungary tried to keep away from the conflict: they didn't want to support Ukraine at first. They took lessons from the events that followed the First World War. They consider the Trianon Treaty unjust. They became part of a conflict of powers and they lost 70% of their land as a consequence. They don't want to be involved in another conflict and bear the consequences (again). There are probably more reasons for the position they kept. I don't know the current situation in Hungary.

Jan Hrdlicka
reflects on life in the Czech Republic, where near neighbour Ukraine's situation has impacted greatly.

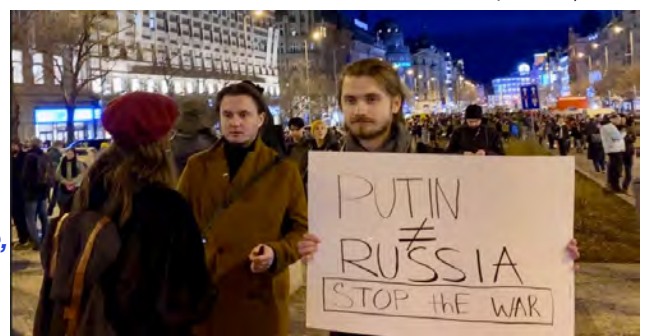


How were we affected? The movement of army vehicles can be seen more often. We were worried that we wouldn't have enough gas for heating our homes this winter. However, we are ok. The prices rose significantly, but we managed to get all the gas we needed. The prices of everything went up which is caused by the war to some extent. However, it is nothing compared to what the Ukrainians are going through.

In the Czech Republic we have a system that alerts the voluntary firefighters to get to their station as soon as possible. It is a very loud siren. There is a test of the sirens every first Wednesday of the month at noon. Since the arrival of the Ukrainians we added a statement in several languages telling everybody that the test is a test only. Many of the refugees have very strong bad memories that could be brought back by the sirens. The sound of sirens meant an air raid was imminent: get to the shelter now!

When we had our Christmas Eve - the beginning of Christmas celebration, we remembered the Ukrainians in war and we prayed for peace. We continue that prayer.

Jan Hrdlicka



**Protests in Prague,
the Czech capital**

Our website

Blogs, podcasts, past and future events – these are all on our Pax Christi Scotland website. All newsletters are archived there. You can pay your annual membership fee on the Membership page and make donations. Please explore and share:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

<https://www.caledonianwebsites.com/>

Membership Reminder

Easiest method? Pay on the membership page of our website.

If you pay by online banking, please give your name to identify your payment.

If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the address below, cheques payable to Pax Christi Scotland.

You can also make regular donations on our 'donate' page - thank you.

Membership fees are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

<http://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

[@PaxScotland](https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland)

[@PaxScotland](https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland)

[@PaxScotland](https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland)

Snail mail:

Pax Christi Scotland
c/o Xaverian Missionaries
Calder Avenue
Coatbridge ML5 4JS

YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

[https://www.youtube.com/](https://www.youtube.com/@paxchristiscotland)

[@paxchristiscotland](https://www.youtube.com/@paxchristiscotland)

Click on the word 'Subscribed' and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

Pax Scotia January-February 2023 Issue 30

'The Letter' and other online essentials

Pope Francis's film *The Letter* is a compelling and powerful witness to the fact that the climate emergency and peace are inextricably linked. That's why we are making it our online event for February.

The film features 'ordinary' people - they are actually extraordinary individuals, but they are from *our* lives and not celebrity ambassadors or famous faces drafted in to get a message across.

That message echoes what Pope Francis says in his *Laudato Si* encyclical, and relates it to the daily toll that climate change is wreaking on lives around the world. The lives of our brothers and sisters and the very existence of the creatures and nature that God asked us to care for.

The Laudato Si Movement produced the film, and we are encouraged to organise screenings in our parishes - but we can also watch it online on Thursday February 2, at a special Scottish Premiere screening at which Dr Lorna Gold, chair of the Laudato Si Movement Board, will answer our questions about protecting our common home.

Bishop Brian McGee, Bishop of Argyll & The Isles, will open the evening with a prayer, and Pax Christi Scotland board member Callum Timms will host the Q & A session.

Details of the screening have been issued to all dioceses for publicising in parishes.

Register at: <https://bit.ly/TheLetterScottishScreening>



The other important date for our diaries is March 8. Join us for *International Women's Day: What Price Peace?*

Our speakers will be Sr Teresia Wamuyu Wachira, co-president of Pax Christi International and a member of the Loreto Sisters (IBVM), and a Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader of the Peace and Conflict studies at St Paul University in Nairobi, Kenya; and Helen Martin, lecturer at the Glasgow University School of Education (People, Place and Social Change).

They are both women who campaign on the important issues that affect our lives, and we are honoured that they will share their thoughts with us on International Women's Day. There will be reminders, but to register, go to:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYtcOGorj4oHd0XJF9Y6ARfik830E-LCbM->

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email