



Pax Scotia

Issue 70

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For those in peril on the sea: Stella Maris is there to help

Peter Mullen is Regional Community Engagement officer of Stella Maris in Scotland & Northern Ireland. His work sees him engaging with churches, parish priests, schools, colleges and groups associated with the Catholic church. Stella Maris was founded in Glasgow in 1920. It's now a worldwide charity and the situation in the Middle East underscores its importance. Whether seafarers are from Scotland or the other side of the world, they rely on Stella Mariis for help.

The war in the Middle East and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz have put shipping and seafarers sharply into the spotlight. An estimated 20,000 seafarers are stranded aboard vessels anchored across the region, waiting anxiously for safe passage. Tragically, at least 10 seafarers are reported to have been killed.

The effect of the blockade is also being felt economically. It puts into perspective how much we all depend on seafarers to ensure that global trade flows smoothly and vital commodities are distributed worldwide. Seafarers are often the 'invisible' workforce. Out of sight and too easily forgotten.

Efforts to free up the Strait for ships to transit and evacuate seafarers have so far had limited success. An official from the International Maritime Organisation (a United Nations agency) recently called it a 'humanitarian crisis' on a scale never seen before in shipping. These seafarers are caught in the crossfire of conflict, becoming innocent casualties of a war not of their making.

While there have been no widespread reports of a shortage of food and supplies onboard stranded ships, the emotional and psychological strain upon crews is immense. Fear, helplessness and deep isolation weigh heavily on seafarers and their families alike. Some describe their condition as "a situation of utter abandonment." Behind every delayed vessel are human lives: sons and daughters, husbands and wives whose families follow events closely, often

overwhelmed with worry.

For many stranded seafarers, the ordeal has been prolonged by the inability to leave their ships even after their contracts have ended. Replacement crews are understandably reluctant to enter an active conflict zone where missiles and drones pose a constant threat. As a result, exhausted crews already on board are left with little option but to extend their contracts, often against their wishes and under considerable emotional pressure.

Stella Maris, the official agency of the Catholic Church, exists to provide pastoral and practical support to seafarers of all faiths and those with none. In times of crisis, that mission becomes even more urgent.

Drawing upon its experience supporting seafarers affected by the war in Ukraine, Stella Maris has developed a safety guidance to help seafarers be prepared and stay safe during missile attacks. Developed initially by Stella Maris in Ukraine, this guidance is now being shared as widely as possible through maritime networks and industry channels.

Developing further from our experience supporting seafarers and their families in Ukraine, we know that there will be much ongoing support needed for seafarers affected by this crisis once they leave the region.

We stand in solidarity with all the seafarers affected by this crisis, and with their families. Stella Maris, along with Aid to the Church in Need, CAFOD, and Missio held a joint Rosary for Peace in May, for all affected by conflict in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Many seafarers find solace in faith and comfort in religion. Our prayers, and the prayers of supporters, give reassurance. It lets them know that they are not forgotten, and that we stand alongside them. It's a reminder that there is hope even in the face of despair.

Peter Mullen

Diary Alert: On July 7, ahead of Sea Sunday, Pax Christi Scotland will host a webinar. Details to come.



Carlos Salinas was born in Chile and is Executive Director of Healing Bridges, a nongovernmental organisation that accompanies the Kofan indigenous people of the Colombian Amazon. He is also a Board Member of the Pax Christi International Fund for Peace, and a member of the Town of New Shoreham's Conservation Commission (Rhode Island, USA.) He is a former Acting Director of Government Relations at Amnesty International USA and their former Advocacy Director for Latin America and the Caribbean.



Seeing what cannot be unseen

WHEN my parents told me that we would be temporarily moving to the United States, I was very excited that we would eventually visit Disney World.

Our first visit exceeded my expectations. We discovered "Pirates of the Caribbean" which became one of our favourite rides: from the skeleton steering a tattered skiff through a stormy night to the canons firing at the Spanish fort to their taking the town. With jolly music in the background, we saw the pirates chasing women, dunking someone in a well, and carting off treasure. As we left, a drunk pirate blissfully splayed by empty caskets of rum, nodded to the music while the town burned.

Many visits and many years later, as we got to the town scenes, instead of seeing cartoons, I saw Mapiripán, a Colombian town that over several days in 1997 was taken by paramilitaries who raped, tortured, and killed villagers, all the while listening to music and dancing. Although the Pirates' music was still peppy and happy, the bliss of the drunken pirate became the bliss of the paramilitaries.

I work in the Colombian Amazon accompanying the Kofan indigenous people. During one night of ceremony of traditional medicine, a Traditional Authority (*curaca* or shaman) asked for my advice. His daughter had been raped by someone we knew, and we knew that there would be no justice. The *curaca* said that

paramilitaries had come to him and offered their help. They had explained in graphic detail how they would extract the confession. He asked me what I thought, and I said that I could not imagine what he and his daughter were going through, that it was his decision to make, but that if it were me, I would desire to have the strength to say "no" even though the temptation was strong.

When he later decided to indeed say "no," I was not surprised, and he told me that when you get such a "favour," you will be asked sooner or later for something in return. The *curaca* saw through the temptation.

In his lifetime, the *curaca* has seen his territory looted for oil, colonised, stolen; transformed from a vast forest into pastures, towns, roads; even the municipal trash dump was placed there. But if this were not enough, he and the entire region's inhabitants have lived through war. He has plenty of excuses to hate and to be angry, but rarely have I seen even hints.

The *curaca* and my Kofan friends who follow the path of traditional medicine all talk about "seeing" (*mirar*) during ceremony. Even in the healing ritual, the *curaca* "sees" what is wrong with a patient and "sees" what to do. They discuss what they have "seen" in the early morning hours, which then informs their decisions. They also teach us to "*pensar bonito*."

Literally translated as "to think

pretty," this is an instruction that one must be informed *by* and look *for* goodness. So it is not enough to "see". The "seeing" must be oriented towards goodness.

This implies being aware of one's surroundings and feelings, thus being able to guard thought and word.

Seeing the Disney Pirates ride as Mapiripán opened my eyes.

I might not hate but my thoughtlessness might enable hatred. I might not engage in violence but my revelling in it might encourage its glorification.

This quick snapshot revealed a change of heart in me that can transform my way of life. As thoughts and words change, deeds not only follow but flow: a path unfolds, the way of nonviolence. A vision that once seen, cannot be unseen.

Carlos Salinas

"In the midst of the many challenges our world is facing at this time, including widespread armed conflicts, divisions among peoples, and the challenges posed by forced migration, efforts to promote nonviolence are more necessary than ever." (Pope Leo XIV, July 2025).



Rosalyn Mauchline is a retired palliative care physician, has been involved in justice and peace issues for many years, and is a member of the Pax Christi Scotland executive committee.

Peacemaking and synodality



Since Pax Christi Scotland came into being, the members of its executive have been aware of a tension between what could be described as the “global” and the “local”. I was reflecting on this when I read the contribution from Dr Agunbiade in the recent Pax Christi Scotland newsletter. He discussed how we in Scotland respond to global issues but also how we look at the differences in views and experiences we have amongst ourselves.

He described these differences - “...not always dramatic or visible, but they matter if peace is to mean anything” - then talked about how peace can be built if we learn to listen.

Pax Christi Scotland members involve themselves in a wide variety of global issues and I think we would accept that there is a sad lack of listening between political leaders – at least in the kind of listening needed to understand, not just to respond.

However, what about the more “local” debate - especially as it concerns our church community within which different views are held on a multitude of issues? What should be our approach to such diversity?

Do we accept the diversity and try to work with it, while others are insisting on a strict adherence to one particular view and still others choose to ignore the differences? Is this last option acceptable especially if we believe a particular view is taking us on a path away from following Jesus’ teachings of mercy, love and compassion for all – and perhaps more specifically for Pax Christi Scotland, taking us away from the gospel message of nonviolence?

Pope Francis taught that the opposite of love is not hate - it is apathy. Dr Agunbiade states that we need to listen. But how do we go about this when perhaps those with differing views rarely actually come together to meet?

I believe we were shown the way by Pope Francis with

Synodality and Conversation in the Spirit.

Many of us will have been involved in the initial synodal meetings in our parishes but I wonder where that process has taken us. Are we developing synodal approaches in our parishes? Are we seeking out different voices and views, especially from those on the margins? Are we living up to “All are Welcome”?

To call ourselves peacemakers, I believe we cannot concentrate solely on the global issues – important as they are – but must look at how we are peacemakers in our own community.

The School for Synodality’s recent newsletter states “the key work of synodality is conversion: of our relationships, our structures and our culture”. It states that we do this by being open to the Holy Spirit, but that this might mean a deeper discernment rather than the quick answer our society encourages us to have.

In a recent sermon I heard a priest stress the importance that each Bishop needs to hear the quietest voice from the smallest parish in the most distant town his diocese. As Peacemakers, as Pax Christi Scotland members, perhaps we need to be prepared to facilitate how this will happen. The Final Synod Document states “the synodal process gave us ‘the spiritual taste’ of what it means to be the People of God”. Perhaps if we all take on board the listening and discernment involved in the synodal process, we can be true peacemakers.

Rosalyn Mauchline

School for Synodality:
www.schoolforsynodality.org.uk
provides resources including “getting started”.

A Festival of Synodality takes place on Saturday 6th June at Glasgow Caledonian University (BCOS)

Our website

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

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

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

Membership Reminder

Please pay **in November** by online banking, and give your name to identify your payment. Use the email address on the website to get banking details.

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 or by standing order - thank you.

Membership fees per annum 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>

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Snail mail:

Pax Christi Scotland
c/o Xaverian Missionaries
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YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

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Connection Despite Conflict



I am Prud Zihahirwa, a young entrepreneur from eastern Democratic

Republic of Congo. I work in education and technology through AFRIX Global, an EdTech company based in Goma. Our mission is to train young people, develop digital skills, and create opportunities in a region where the future is often overshadowed by conflict and crisis.

I am also part of the Pax Christi Scotland reading group. For many people around the world, joining a Zoom meeting or participating in an online discussion seems simple. Here, it can become a daily struggle.

In May 2026, worrying news spread across our region: a case of Ebola was confirmed in Goma. The virus identified was the Bundibugyo orthoebolavirus strain, a particularly concerning species because there is currently no approved vaccine or treatment available for it. The first case of this outbreak had been detected in Ituri: a nurse who arrived at a health centre in Bunia in April. In Goma, the first confirmed patient was the wife of a man who had died from the same virus in Bunia.

When the news was officially announced, I was already on my way to the territory of Beni, still in North Kivu province. To reach there, I had to pass through Rwanda and Uganda because direct travel has become extremely complicated. Today, part of the Congolese government operates from this area, while Goma remains under the control of AFC/M23 rebels.

Goma has now spent nearly two years under occupation. The city functions without normal banking services or a working airport. Armed groups impose rules across almost every sector of daily life. Even internet providers face pressure, taxes, and threats. Some have shut down, while others struggle to operate. Internet access is unstable and sometimes completely unavailable. And when there is internet, electricity often disappears. Power cuts have become part of normal life.

Despite all this, I still try to participate in the Pax Christi Scotland reading group. But sometimes I miss meetings not because I do not care, but because access to electricity and internet is never guaranteed here. Even in Beni, I sometimes have to walk more than two kilometers just to find a stable enough connection to send a message or join an online discussion.

These realities slow down our work, our education, and our projects. They also affect our mental well-being. Yet despite the obstacles, I refuse to give up.

Through AFRIX Global, we continue training young people, organising educational programs, and creating digital opportunities despite war, power cuts, and health crises.

Being part of Pax Christi Scotland means a lot to me. It reminds me that beyond borders, conflict, and epidemics, there are still spaces for listening, dialogue, and human solidarity. Here in eastern Congo, staying connected to the world is already a form of hope. Prud Zihahirwa

* Prud regularly writes blogs & articles for Pax Christi Scotland