



# Pax Scotia

## Issue 71

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## For a nonviolent world, choose understanding, listening & solidarity



**Rev Dr Urzula Glienecke** is a Latvian theologian, artist and activist living in Scotland. She is a member of the Iona Community. She grew up in the Soviet occupied territory of Latvia, went on the barricades for freedom of thought and faith when she was 17, started to study theology and world religions as soon as the faculty reopened in Riga and has been part of worldwide ecumenical and interfaith movements, organisations and networking of all faiths and none ever since. She is passionate about social and environmental justice and working together with people on the margins.

I was asked to reflect on what I would tell students about achieving peace and a nonviolent world. So, of course I asked the young people themselves as they have a lot of wisdom and vision. This is what some of the interfaith students at the University of Edinburgh think about what peace and nonviolence mean to them in the current world situation:

“I think for a lot of young people today, peace isn't just the absence of war, but also justice, dialogue, compassion, and care for one another. A nonviolent world begins when we choose understanding over fear, listening over division, and solidarity over hatred across all faiths and cultures”.

And I'm proud and happy to say that many of them do their part wherever they are. The students I asked, for example, formed a new student interfaith society. There, young people from 6 different faiths come together and talk about issues that are on their hearts: how their faith traditions deal with conflict, how their faiths encourage peacebuilding, reconciliation, and forgiveness in times of conflict, what nature and environment mean in their traditions, what healing means to them and many other topics.

I think that creating a space - a safe and brave space for people to come together, listen to each other's pain and hope, and find ways to achieve “peace rooted in justice” for all (as we say at the Iona Community) is essential,. Especially if it can bring together people who have been alienated and “othered” before. At times it can be difficult or almost impossible, but we can only try, after peace and safety are achieved or before.

Speaking from my own personal experience under the Soviet Union's occupation of my old mother country Latvia, I can relate to how difficult it is. The aggressor often just doesn't listen at all, doesn't change at all. Russia still hasn't recognised the suffering it caused in the Baltic countries. My great-great grandfather's orchard - the apple of his eye - is still gone; the friends who died in the Siberian deportations are still gone. At least the separated families (many of which hadn't been able to meet for 50 years or more) can meet again. And the three Baltic countries are independent and free again.

How did we achieve it nonviolently? We sang, we protested, we prayed, we hoped. We held hands in a human chain throughout Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, all the way. We supported each other. We went on barricades to protect the communication centres when the Russian army took over. We formed young and not so young people's groups in the Underground Church (mine was literally underground in a cellar under a church where a female Latvian Lutheran priest, Aida Predele, led a group of teenagers who later became leaders). We hoped that the world would hear us. And it did. We were lucky, very lucky. I hope that other voices will be heard today just as strongly.

For me one of the sustaining pillars of that time was song. The Singing Revolution. Putting messages of hope and resilience in art and music. Taizé chants in the cellar under the church gave us a connection with young people all around Europe, first indirectly and then as soon as the borders were halfway open – in person. Brother Roger, founder of the Taizé started to bring young people together to sing, pray and meet each other, so that there would be no wars in Europe in the future. There are youth meetings every New Year in a different European city and opportunities to visit the Community in France. It was life-changing and hope-giving to me as a young person. Meeting other young people, being together, getting to know each other and forming lifelong friendships. Just as it happens at the Camas Centre of the Iona Community in Scotland or the Corrymeela Community in Ireland.

There is a piece of music written in the time of our resistance in Latvia. It's called Lacplesis. The story it tells is about the protector of the land whose strength is in his ears. The oppressor cuts them off in a battle, but Lacplesis tells the children of the land “I can still hear. But call louder, call louder!”

*Urzula Glienecke*



**Callum Timms** is a member of Pax Christi Scotland's Executive Committee, a Principal Teacher of Guidance in a Catholic secondary school in the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh, and recently submitted an MPhil Thesis examining the challenges facing contemporary Catholic schools in Scotland.

**"He achieved success ...who has left the world better than he found it"**  
(Stanley, n.d.).



# Peacebuilding: A sense of urgency needed

The sense of leaving our common home a little better than I found it has been the driving force behind my involvement in matters of peace and justice, and undoubtedly played a part in leading me to a career in education and to joining the Executive Committee of Pax Christi Scotland.

This sense of purpose gained a clear focus and that motivation was given impetus eighteen months ago when my wife and I welcomed our daughter into the world.

However, we know that our common home faces many challenges. A glance at the summary of pressing issues on the UN website might be best described as a cure for optimism (United Nations, n.d.). Yet the late Pope Francis offered encouragement in the face of despair, urging that "Hope is also a task that Christians have a duty to cultivate and put to good use for the sake of all their brothers and sisters" (Pope Francis, 2024).

Each year, I am privileged to see that hope in the acts of loving service demonstrated by pupils in their final year of Catholic education who engage faithfully with the Pope Benedict XVI Caritas Award. The Caritas Award requires young people to learn, reflect and bear witness to their faith through service to their school and wider community (SCES, n.d.). This year, over 2000 young people across Scotland secured the Caritas Award. Young people choose, time and time again, to see

this as an opportunity to serve the poorest and most marginalised. In doing so, they are making a tangible difference and their incredible contribution to the common good has a ripple effect which offers hope and reassurance that the future can still be bright.

Turning to the challenge of rising racism, far-right sentiment and disinformation (EIS, 2026), it seems clear that every Catholic who calls Scotland home should be motivated by faith to reject this divisive ideology. As a teacher in Catholic schools, it is essential to recognise that the story of Catholic education in Scotland hinges on immigration (McKinney and McCluskey, 2019). It is incumbent upon every individual, as well as institutions and organisations as well as their representatives – including teachers and clerics – to call out racism, to challenge disinformation, and to be unequivocal in our rejection of the far-right rhetoric which threatens our communities.

In recent weeks, Scotland's reputation on the world stage has been one of kindness, humour and good-natured cohesion as the Tartan Army descended on the USA. May our culture lead us to rediscover our roots, and may we always remember "that Man to Man the world o'er, shall brithers be for a' that" (Burns, 2003).

So, as I reflect on that central mission to leave behind a better world, I look to that world in which my daughter will

grow up. There are plenty of reasons to worry, yet the example of so many committed young people, and the example set by the Tartan Army, offer glimmers of hope which I pray will drive us forward in the mission of peacebuilding. May we work together now, with a great sense of urgency, to build that future which our children deserve wherever they may be in the world.

*Callum Timms*

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# Making an impact: Pax Christi working for world peace

**“We believe that our movement’s survival and impact depend on a strong, reciprocal relationship between National Sections and Pax Christi International (through the International Secretariat with its PCI Advocacy priorities and Programmes). We cannot achieve our global aims if National Sections view their local work as primary and the international scene as secondary. Equally, the International movement cannot survive without the strength and vitality of its National Sections.” (Pax Christi International Executive)**

As Pax Christi International prepares for its AGM on June 30, we reflect on the fact that we must all work together if we are to achieve a nonviolent world.

Pax Christi Scotland’s members are valued worldwide by the Pax Christi movement because you help your executive committee to work not only for nonviolence in Scotland but also for peace around the globe, working with *all* national sections.

Thank you.

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## **Stella Maris: Working for mariners’ peace of mind**

Join us on **July 7** from 7pm- 8.30pm to learn about the vital work of Stella Maris ahead of Sea. Sunday. Founded in Scotland, Stella Maris supports the peace of mind of mariners from the Clyde to the Straits of Hormuz.

Register in advance for this meeting:  
[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/\\_qkW\\_IAqQgC1Xq9AYCobYg](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/_qkW_IAqQgC1Xq9AYCobYg)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

**"Childhood Thief"**  
**by Ahmed Miqdad**  
*In his helicopter,  
A notorious and merciless figure,  
Born of a Ukrainian mother  
And a Polish father,  
Came to my sacred land.  
He hovers beneath the grey sky,  
Disturbing the stillness of the darkness,  
Shattering the silence of the night  
With the thunder of his deadly rockets.  
A thief of life, of laughter, and of hope,  
He stalks the dreams of the innocent.  
He targets sleeping children in their tents,  
Burns their fragile bodies,  
Tears apart their beloved teddies,  
And scatters their smiles to the wind.  
He turns lullabies into cries,  
And moonlit nights into scenes of sorrow.  
The stars bear witness to the tragedy,  
While the earth trembles beneath the flames.  
Beautiful dreams are buried in ashes,  
And promises of tomorrow fade with the smoke.  
Yet from the ruins, memories remain,  
And the voices of the innocent endure,  
Calling for justice,  
Calling for peace,  
Calling for a dawn free from fear.*

Thanks to Palestinian poet Ahmed Miqdad for allowing us to publish another of his poems from Gaza. Pax Christi Scotland is represented on Pax Christi International’s Holy Land Working Group and meets on line each month to hear updates from Palestinians in the front line.

## 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 snail mail 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>

[@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)

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

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

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# Peace: more than lack of war



Wearing another hat (*writes Marian Pallister, chair of Pax Christi Scotland*), I spent time in Zambia in June at St Columba's Secondary School. The charity I founded to support vulnerable children in the sub-Saharan country funded the first teaching block of the school ten years ago. We celebrated that tenth anniversary during the week of St Columba's feast day, commemorating the saint after whom we called the school, being an Argyll & the Isles-based charity.

With politics in the northern hemisphere creating havoc with *our* lives, I wanted to know what younger students hoped for the future of *their* country in this election year in Zambia. I spoke with Matildah Mwandila, who is 16 and in Grade 12, and 14-year-old Luyando Mwanza, who is in Grade 10. Matildah will sit her final exams this year. They won't be able to vote until they are 18.

It was interesting to hear them both echo the words that the Edinburgh University students used when Rev Dr Urzula Glienecke asked them about peace (see P1). "Peace," these Zambian students told me, "isn't just the absence of war. It is about peace of mind."

We live in a world where violence of all kinds reaches out to the furthest corners.

One of the biggest threats to the peace of mind of these young women is US President Trump's cutting of medical aid to sub-Saharan Africa. They know that without the drugs that have been controlling HIV & Aids for most of this century, that curse on humanity will return with a vengeance.

I first went to Zambia in the late 1990s to cover a Pan-African conference on the pandemic being held in Lusaka University. As a journalist, I visited many rural and urban families from which a generation had been obliterated. Grannies were looking after the children of *their* children, who had died of this cruel disease. In a poverty-stricken country, who could care for a dozen children? Religious Sisters spoke of "one-meal-a-day" families as they tried to support the most vulnerable. Hundreds of kids flooded the streets of the capital trying to survive because those grannies and aunties couldn't provide even one meal.

It was the first President Bush who came to the rescue, sending ship loads of drugs to fight HIV & Aids. Mother-to-baby transmission ended. Person-to-person transmission was controlled. But the virus still exists, and Matildah and Luyando are only too well aware of that. That a US president in *their* lifetime should withdraw that lifeline threatens their peace of mind, they explained. Peace, as they said, is not just the absence of war.

And the added burden of overseas aid cuts to finance the UK's military expansion doubles the blow, as that funding helped support Zambian education and health care. I also spoke to stressed out teachers and doctors bleakly staring into a future of overcrowded classrooms and lack of medicines.

***Peace of mind certainly comes with much more than the lack of war .***

The two St Columba's students are proud that Zambia is a peaceful country in the accepted sense. But scratch the surface and it and so many other African countries are clinging onto "peace" in the face of violence in the form of deadly cuts to aid.

I promised Luyano, and Matildah, primary teachers with classes of 150 and doctors with empty medicine cabinets that I would raise with *our* politicians what overseas aid cuts have done to them. Will you join me to try and restore their peace of mind? It's one of the world's greatest peace issues right now

*Marian Pallister*

\* July/August's podcast on the website will carry the full Rebecca/Luyando interview.