



Pax Scotia

Issue 66

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Faithfulness: to truth, to human dignity, to peace and justice



Usama Nicola is a Palestinian civil society activist, a tour guide, husband, and father of three, rooted in the ancient and resilient city of Bethlehem. He brings together his love for people, justice, and faith in everything he does. Bethlehem, he says, is the city where heaven met earth, and not only his home, but also the heart of his mission. For him, it is a sacred place where history, struggle, and faith meet; a city that teaches him daily about rootedness, resistance, and radical love.

As we step into a new year, many people speak of fresh starts, resolutions, and optimism. From where I stand, in Bethlehem, the idea of a “new beginning” feels complicated. The wounds of the past year are still open. The violence has not paused for the turning of the calendar. Grief does not reset itself on January first.

And yet, the new year ahead still matters. How we enter it matters. What we choose to carry forward, and what we refuse to normalize, matters deeply.

The past year has taught us, painfully, that injustice can be prolonged, bureaucratized, and even justified in polite language. It has shown us how quickly human suffering can be reduced to numbers, headlines, or background noise. Many people, especially us Palestinians, have learned again what it means to live with uncertainty as a constant companion. Not knowing if homes will remain standing, if families will remain together, if tomorrow will be safer than today.

Looking ahead, there is no honest way to promise that things will suddenly improve. Peace cannot be wished into existence. Justice cannot be postponed indefinitely without consequences. The year ahead will likely demand more patience than we would like, and more courage than we feel ready for.

But it will also demand something quieter and just as difficult - faithfulness.

Faithfulness to truth, even when truth is inconvenient or costly. Faithfulness to the dignity of every human life, especially when some lives are treated as disposable. Faithfulness to the long, slow work of peace and justice, when the world rewards speed, slogans, and sides.

For those of us living here, hope does not look like certainty. It looks more like persistence. It is the decision to keep showing up, to keep naming injustice, to keep teaching our children that their lives matter, even when the world sends the opposite message. It is the refusal to let fear have the final word.

For companions and friends abroad, including Pax Christi Scotland, this year calls for a different but equally vital form of faithfulness. Not turning away when the news cycle moves on. Not growing tired of solidarity. Not accepting the framing that some suffering is inevitable, or that silence is neutrality. Solidarity, when practiced honestly, is not dramatic. It is steady. It listens more than it speaks. It asks hard questions of power, not just gentle ones of conscience. It stays present when hope feels thin.

As a Christian, living in the land where the story of incarnation began, I am reminded that God did not enter the world through strength or domination, but through vulnerability. This year invites us again to measure success not by control or victory, but by faithfulness to love, justice, and mercy.

I do not know what this year will bring. None of us does. But I do know this - peace will not come from forgetting the pain of the past year, or from rushing too quickly toward comfort. It will come from remembering, from telling the truth, and from choosing, again and again, to stand with those whose voices are too often ignored.

That is my prayer for this year. Not an easy year, but a faithful one.

Usama Nicola



Faslane Ash
Wednesday 2025:

Left: Brian Quail . Right:
Michael Sutherland



Do not depend on the hope of results but on the value, rightness and truth

"And so I'll continue to continue to pretend, my life will never end, and flowers never bend with the rainfall". For some reason these words of the poignant song by Paul Simon keep coming to mind as we cringe under our daily deluge of absurdities from The Donald (Trump) and his thugs.

The word *fascist* is overworked and overused. Hannah Arendt - as always - illuminates the situation. "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the dedicated communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction, true and false, no longer exists." False News is the universal excuse, the get out of jail card. Satan is the Father of Lies and, boy, he is on the rampage right now.

"The Unspeakable" is a term Thomas Merton coined at the heart of the sixties after JFK's assassination in the midst of the escalating Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, and the further assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy. In each of those soul-shaking events Merton sensed an evil whose depth and deceit seemed to go beyond the capacity of words to describe.

"One of the awful facts of our age," Merton wrote in 1965, "is the evidence that [the world] is stricken indeed, stricken to the very core of its being by the presence of the Unspeakable." The Vietnam War, the race to a global war, and the interlocking murders of John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy were all signs of the Unspeakable. It remains

deeply present in our world.

When we become more deeply human, as Merton understood the process, the wellspring of our compassion moves us to confront the Unspeakable.

Which brings us to one of the Unspeakable evils in our time, nuclear weapons and our annual Ash Wednesday liturgy, heralding the start of Lent, at Faslane.

An activist is someone who cannot help but fight for something. That person is usually not motivated by a need for power, or money, or fame, but in fact driven slightly mad by some injustice, some cruelty, some unfairness - So much so that he or she is compelled by some internal moral engine to act to make it better.

As we stand at the gates in the rain (as is often the case) looking at the vast complex, the small town of military buildings, the jetties and cranes, the armed guards protecting the bombs and occasionally watch Trident submarines plough through the waters of the Gare Loch it is easy to wonder what good we are doing.

What can a few activists hope to achieve at the gates of such horror. Do we really expect our humble witness to shut down Faslane, or to bring an end to nuclear weapons? Merton, "Do not depend on the hope of results ..., you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea you start more and more to concentrate not on the

results but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. " In this most truthless of times we witness to the Truth, Jesus Christ, accepting the need to repent, acknowledging the solidarity of sin.

"All the good that you will do will come not from you but from the fact that you have allowed yourself, in the obedience of faith, to be used by God's love."

Brian Quail and Michael Sutherland

The Ash Wednesday liturgy starts at the South Gate of Faslane on Wednesday 18th February 2026 at 3pm.

To get to Faslane Naval Base from Glasgow via public transport, take a ScotRail train from Glasgow Queen Street to Helensburgh Central, then transfer to a local bus (eg: the 316 service operated by Garelochhead Minibuses) towards Coulpport/ Garelochhead, getting off near the base .

There is limited car parking space at the South Gate .



Anna Blackman is Lecturer in Catholic Religious Education at the University of Glasgow. Anna is also a member of the Education Committee for the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and co-facilitates the research strand on Gospel Nonviolence and the Life of the Church for the Catholic Institute of Nonviolence. Her research focuses on peace and nonviolence within Catholic theology, Catholic social teaching and practice, and Catholic education.

Here she reflects on Pax Christi Scotland's first and new book projects...

Peacework: Pax Christi Scotland's next online book project



In November 2024, we launched the Pax Christi Scotland Book Project as a way to reflect with others on peace and nonviolence. As we wanted to appeal to broad levels of familiarity with the topic, from seasoned peace activists to novices in nonviolence, we settled on a text from the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace within the Church and the World*. As a project of Pax Christi International, the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative aims to mainstream nonviolence within the Church, arguing that 'nonviolence is at the heart of the vision and message of Jesus'; and to promote nonviolence as both practically and theologically viable. Published in 2020, *Advancing Nonviolence* presents a firm basis for understanding the foundations of Catholic nonviolence, surveying its scriptural, historical, and theological roots, as well as exploring concrete examples and practices of nonviolence within the Church that speak to its effectivity and impact.

We explored the book over a series of online monthly meetings, and, to explore such a wide-ranging text, we divided the book into themes and topics to focus on in each session. These included reflection on what nonviolence is; why people choose nonviolence; violence and nonviolence within Scripture; Jesus, Christology, and nonviolence; creation, ecology, and violence towards creation; and gender-based violence. Recordings and handouts for each session are available on the Pax Christi Scotland website.

When planning the project, perhaps biased by my lecturing background, I thought that meetings would tend towards a more academic "lecture" and seminar style format. After the very first session, I saw that the book project was going to evolve beyond anything I could have hoped for. Our meetings became a space of shared learning and genuine encounter. I was humbled by the honesty with which people shared their own struggles with nonviolence, which allowed for authentic dialogue in which we learnt and grew together. I found this such a personal and spiritual experience and, even though these are texts I read daily, truly enriched by own understanding of

nonviolence. I hope that others found this as powerful as I did.

I am delighted that we will be continuing in our shared learning journey through the next iteration of the book project which will begin on 26th January. This time we will be focusing on **Peacework** by Henri Nouwen. Known as one of the most popular spiritual writers of our times, Nouwen's work sees the application of the Gospel messages of peace and justice within society as inextricably linked to our inner, personal, spiritual lives. As John Dear writes in his forward, 'war, nuclear weapons... widespread poverty, hunger... the threat of environmental destruction... are matters of life and death, which means they are first and foremost spiritual matters'. In **Peacework**, Nouwen reflects on the spirituality of peacemaking, enacted and nourished through prayer, resistance, and community. Written at the height of the Cold War, **Peacework** continues to be pertinent for contemporary Christian discipleship in a world plagued by increasing conflict and tension. As with our previous book project, this is open to everyone with any level of familiarity. I am thrilled to be continuing the project and look forward to sharing in what I am sure will be a deep and stimulating discussion.

Anna Blackman

Find recordings of the first book project at <https://www.paxchristiscotland.org/book-project/>
The new project will also be available on the website.

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 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

Please pay in **November** on the **membership page of our website**, or, 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 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>

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

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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)

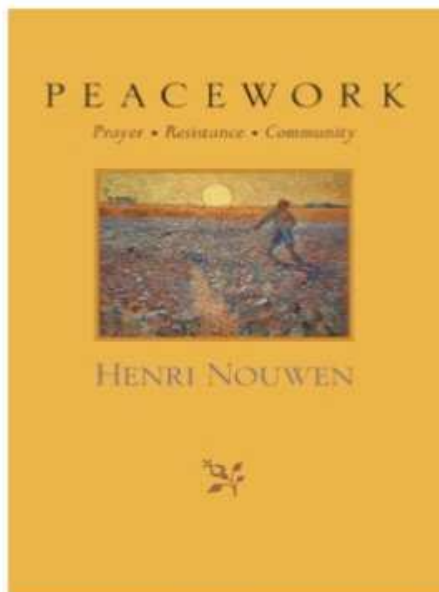
Click on the word 'Subscribed' and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

Pax Scotia: January-February 2026 Issue 66



The Pax Christi Scotland Book Project

Here's how the new book project will work...



Our Programme, led by Anna Blackman:

January 26 –

Foreword and intro pp.6-24

March 2 –

Prayer

pp. 25-47

March 23 –

Resistance 1

pp.48-68 ('saying yes')

April 27-

Resistance 2

pp. 68-97

May 18 –

Community and

Conclusion

pp.98-127.

Pax Christi Scotland

2026 Book Project with Anna Blackman

Exploring Henri Nouwen's book on working for peace:

'Peacework'

(Foreword by John Dear)

Join Pax Christi Scotland for another step along the pathway to a nonviolent world. Anna Blackman, Lecturer in Catholic Religious Education at Glasgow University and a member of the Education Committee for the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, will guide us through five sessions of discussion.

To register for the first session on January 26, click the link below:

Jan 26, 2026, 19:00UK time

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/70leFSJJRRKvqR2eNELmw>

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

As you can see from the flyer, each month Anna will introduce discussion of a different part of Henri Nouwen's Book **Peacework**. We begin on Monday, January 26 at 7pm UK time.

A new link will go out every month to those signed up for the first session (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/70leFSJJRRKvqR2eNELmw>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting). Thanks to all signed up already.

Why join us? Although written during the Cold War, the book is extremely relevant to our lives today. And as Nouwen writes, "We are sent to this world to be peacemakers in His name."