

PAX CHRISTI AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

KIA TAU TE RANGIMARIE KI A TAATOU KATOA / WORKING FOR PEACE FOR ALL EVERYWHERE



This month's news...

Calling Out Evil

by Peter Cullinane

News from Pax Christi Whangarei

Dignity vs Prejudice (Part 1)

by Barbara Te Miha

Tēnā koutou katoa

Winter is the season that Aotearoa is experiencing. Wet weather and flooding are happening in some parts of the country. Winter is traditionally a time of spending more time indoors; a time of reflection and making plans for when the weather gets warmer.

The world now needs a time to reflect. The people of this world, particularly those in positions of authority, need to pause and listen actively to the voices of the most vulnerable. COVID-19 may be dominating the headlines, but there is a worrying rise of stories that show intolerance of each other, within communities and between nations.

One value or principle I invite people to reflect on is that of *Manaakitanga*. Put simply, that of nurturing relationships; ensuring that we value, respect, and uphold the dignity of the other. Focusing on making relationships flourish in a dynamic, healthy way that benefits all.

In this time of self-reflection, I pray for myself and for the world, that we may actively engage in *Manaakitanga*. That *Manaakitanga* will spread like ripples on a pond throughout the Earth and that peace will reign.

Happy reading.

Bridget Crisp rsm

Calling Out Evil

by Peter Cullinane

The unfolding of God's plan for us does not run in parallel with our ordinary lives and ordinary human history. Ordinary life is what God is bringing to its fulfilment. That fulfilment is already assured in Jesus' resurrection, and becomes ours through union with Him.

But we know there are also darker forces at work in the world. So, just as we need to notice the signs of God's creative and saving love, so too, we need to be alert to what is evil - also fermenting within 'ordinary' life. It is a matter of sharpening our moral awareness, and standing up for what is right - all the more because it is not the State's role to criminalize all forms of wrong doing. So, what is involved when we talk about evil in today's world?

In many ways sin brings its own punishment. But Jesus taught us not to make a simplistic connection between suffering and supposed sins. Nor may we scapegoat, by simply blaming evil forces for unwanted human behaviour and natural events. To take responsibility is part of what it means to be human, and to be fully human and alive is God's agenda for us - and is how we honour God. But it would be naïve not to call out the sources of evil, wherever in ordinary life they show up.

NOT WANTING TO KNOW

It hardly matters that Jesus and his contemporaries did not have our scientific understanding of illnesses. Relieving suffering humanity, whatever the source of suffering, including malign spiritual activity, was a sign of Jesus' mission.

It doesn't occur to us to blame people who lived in pre-scientific times for not having scientific answers. They assumed the sun revolved around planet earth, and that the world was flat. Their scholarship was also pre-scientific, so they assumed the Genesis account of creation over seven days was historical narrative.

But it is one thing to have pre-scientific understanding in pre-scientific times. It is quite another to benefit by today's sciences but then turn a blind eye because the scientific facts don't suit some agenda or match someone's slogans. Scientists could have explained that it really was snow that blanketed Texas, and not some other substance sent by President Biden and Google! And scientists world-wide testify to the reality of Covid 19 and the need for hygienic measures against it; no need to misrepresent and mock Pope Francis' teachings!

It seems that conspiracy theories have always been around, mainly on the fringes. And it seems that social media now help to mainstream them, just by making them available to people who often feel alienated in some way and suspicious of official explanations, and are looking for alternative explanations.

Again, we need not attribute blame. Nevertheless, there is an element of irrationality in preferring theories that are greatly more implausible and bizarre than anything the sciences propose; in fact, closer to the explanations of soothsayers and witchdoctors of pre-scientific times. There is also an element of bondage in the way such theories can take hold, and sometimes a certain aggressiveness and hankering for confrontation. Something more than just misunderstanding is involved here.

SOMETHING MORE

Perhaps there is a clue to this "something more" in what the Book of Revelation says about Satan's involvement in human affairs and his being "in a rage because he knows that his time is short" (12:12).

The origin of moral evil is ultimately mysterious. It doesn't properly belong within a creation that "God saw was good", indeed, "very good". Hebrew faith's attempt to explain pointed to a source outside of human nature, that is capable of deceiving us, and to human free will. In the Hebrew and Christian scriptures Satan is depicted as "a murderer and liar", indeed "the father of lies",

Calling out Evil cont.

“deceiver”, “prince of darkness” and “enemy of humanity”, which is what the name Satan means. And anti-human is still his trademark. (Is it possible to watch 1930s film of Hitler addressing the crowds and their being taken in by him, without thinking of a satanic power at work – in ways that looked ordinary?) In the prayer Jesus taught us, we ask to be delivered from the power of the evil one.

A more recent example of the misuse of power showed itself in shameless lies, vilification and vengeful retaliation against critics, officials and commentators, tacit incitement to violence, corruption and self-glorification – and crowds being taken in by him. These characteristics, singly and together, are anti-human just by being divisive and destructive of human relationships.

DEEPER THAN POLITICS – CULTURE

When a leader is a catalyst for such anti-human activities, it is likely that he is also the product of a culture that has made it easy for him to be and act like that, with impunity. We might feel that kind of politics is “not us”. But what about the cultural chaos out of which it emerges – when the underlying planks of human decency and requirements of civilized life are being eroded? For example:

- When it becomes acceptable to deny facts - scientific facts (“the pandemic isn’t happening”); or historical facts (“the Holocaust didn’t happen”), and acceptable to speak blithely of falsehoods as “alternative facts”, it is reality that is not being accepted. How can there be genuine dialogue if facts don’t matter? How can there be education? What would be the point of historical records? ...
- When truth means whatever the individual wants it to mean, the result is shallow thinking and the kind of gullibility that will believe anything. And those who relativize truth in this way leave us without grounds to regard them as reliable and credible.
- Ideological clamouring for “my rights” without similar commitment to, or even mention of, “my responsibilities” can be a self-centred disregard for the common good.

- Freedom of speech is sometimes spoken of as if it has no boundaries, not even respect for the innate dignity of other persons. Unfettered discussion of ideas, yes; trashing persons, no. Otherwise, what is wrong with deception, cyber bullying, and even violence?
- The best way of countering misinformation and people’s fears is by trustworthy reporting and reliable information. A weakness within kiwi culture is the general public’s low expectations regarding news coverage and analysis. TV coverage is ‘lite’, as any comparison with BBC or Aljazeera shows. Years of getting less leads to expecting less – a gradual process of dumbing down. The situation worsens as TV channels increasingly resort to the techniques of entertainment as the way they present their news “shows”.
- A culture erodes when self-indulgence is not matched by self-control: the sheer extent of physical and sexual abuse against women, both in NZ and world-wide, and the circumstances in which that violence spikes (e.g. during pandemic lockdowns), strongly indicate that the missing factor in many men is the virtue of self-control. Virtue, by definition, is difficult choices made easier through practice. We practise self-control whenever we choose not to do something we would like to do. If self-control isn’t practised during growing-up years, expect violence later. A society that belittles the practice of chastity cannot expect its rates of violence against women to go down. Violence served up as entertainment ‘normalises’ violence; trivialising sexuality ‘normalises’ its misuse.

OTHER FORMS OF ANTI-HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Anti-human behaviour, though sometimes strident, is not always carried out with bluster. Sometimes it just quietly ignores the findings of science. For example: the slogan “it’s my body” is intended to direct attention away from the scientific fact that the newly conceived is actually someone else’s body; scientifically speaking, it is a “microscopic human being” with its own identity, even before implantation in the womb. It needs only to develop, and for this it needs its mother’s body. But it is

Calling out Evil cont.

not just a part of her body, and so the slogan is deceitful.

Anti-human behaviour is not limited to where it kills relationships and lives. On the spectrum of 'ordinary' life, people's commercial and business activities can also be blighted by the anti-human virus. Systems that widen the gap between a wealthy class and homelessness are ultimately anti-human. For example:

In the housing market, de facto priority is given to investors and speculators for whom houses are commodities more than they are homes. Newsreaders speak in glowing terms of a "strong" market and of "growth", always from the perspective of those who profit by higher prices, to the disadvantage of those who are struggling to get a home, many squeezed between homelessness and high rents. Banks continue to refine their methods of making financial transactions, not just by installing more sophisticated systems that reduce their workforce, but also by removing simpler, customer friendly systems. Like it or not, technocracy leads to elitism and exclusion.

Anti-human activity, and anti-science ideology, reach fever pitch when promoted in the name of "religion". This is hardly surprising because "religion" of this kind is at war with itself, given that religion, properly understood, is pro-human and pro-science. ISIS carries out atrocities and murders in the name of Islam, which it grossly misrepresents.

Catholics who grossly misunderstand their faith also conduct attacks that are venomous. Fellow Catholics find themselves being vilified, subjected to name-calling and mockery, slandered by the misrepresentation of their intentions and their actions. Significantly, some of those who indulge in this kind of abuse seem to get most satisfaction when their targets are authority figures. It is as if to pull themselves up they need to pull others down.

Even here, there is no need to apportion blame; many act out of various kinds of insecurity and especially fear, and in some cases trauma and mental health issues. But it is necessary to judge their actions. How do their actions measure up to Christian norms of



behaviour? According to St Paul, Christians are to avoid all "bitterness, hard words, slander and malice" (Eph. 4:31), and stop "biting and tearing one another to pieces" (Gal. 5:15). Websites devoid of love don't make the cut.

ORDINARY BUT NOT NORMAL

It is an ancient teaching that "you shall not allege the example of the many as an excuse for doing wrong". (Exodus 23:2).

Many other evils, some much worse, could have been named in this essay. But this sample suffices to make the point that anti-human activities, unchallenged, are gradually deemed 'normal' and socially acceptable - and even legally sanctioned. Tracking that trajectory, especially the progression from cultural erosion to social, political and economic disorders and personal tragedies, could be a useful exercise in critical thinking for senior college students - the formation of future leaders.

Peter Cullinane is Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Palmerston North. Bishop Peter is currently the Co-President of Pax Christi Aotearoa New Zealand.

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News from Pax Christi Whangarei.

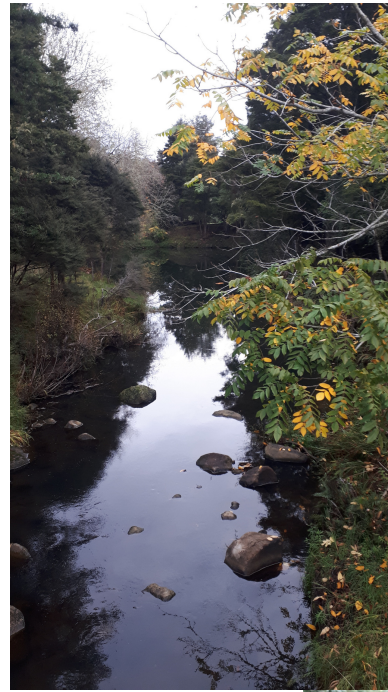
To mark the anniversary of *Laudato Si*, a week in May from 16th-24th, was dedicated to focus on the action that we can take to hear and respond to the care of the poor and the care of our Earth. To raise the awareness of our church community we put a notice in the Parish bulletin over two weeks with suggestions of action that we can take to better care for our common home. This included ideas of what we could abstain from during this time. We were invited to abstain from buying, from eating meat, from using plastics, from overusing electricity and from silence. This was an invitation to *speak out about the need to make changes to build a more sustainable world for all.*

For the Global Day of Action on the 24th we had a Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion at 7.00am that had a focus on Caring for all of creation and the midday Mass had the same focus. We organised a reflective walk in creation at 4.30pm that day which took us to a waterfall, along a stream, past an area that had recently been planted in native trees and through native bush where we were able to see and touch the grandeur of the Kauri trees growing there. Although poorly attended it was a wonderful place to walk with others.

In the struggle for justice and peace we joined with the Palestinian Solidarity Group to set up an information table at the local markets last Saturday in support of the Palestinian people. We marched to the Labour Party Office to present a petition which, amongst other things, asked for the expulsion of the Israeli embassy in Wellington and to sever diplomatic relations with the state of Israel. There was a lot of interest and many people signed the petition.

Pope Francis said "Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace and the joyful celebration of life"

*Elizabeth Beazley
Pax Christi Whangarei.*



*Images of Pax Christi
Whangarei 'Walk in
Creation.
Photos: Elizabeth
Beazley.*





Barbara Te Miha has been associated with Pax Christi for several years. The following article will be split into two parts. The first part, which is in this edition of the newsletter explores prejudice considering historical events and catholic social teaching. The second part of the article delves into the principle of the common good and that of dignity and issues that are affecting us today. This will be published in our next edition of the newsletter.

Dignity vs Prejudice

“Since something of the glory of God shines on the face of every person, the dignity of every person before God is the basis of the dignity of man before other men.” [1]

These words from the Catholic Church’s document *Gaudium et Spes*, highlight the principle of Human Dignity. Proposing all men and women an integral and solidary humanism capable of creating a new social, economic and political order; founded on the dignity and freedom of every human person, to be brought about in peace, justice and solidarity. Solidary humanism is a declaration that innate humanity must prevail over the dehumanising actions of a few.

Christian revelation then, shines a new light on the identity, vocation and the ultimate destiny of the human person and the whole human race. Every person is created by God, is loved and saved in Jesus Christ and finds fulfilment by creating relationships of love, justice and solidarity with others. These very human activities, based on God’s ultimate plan for humankind, promote the dignity and vocation for each and every one of us.

Gaudium et Spes goes further: *“Hence, the social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person, since the order of things is to be subordinate to the order of persons, not the other way around [2] ... Every political, economic, social, scientific and cultural programme must be inspired by the awareness of the primacy of each human being over society.” [3]*

In the aftermath of World War II, the world struggled to come to terms with the atrocities wreaked on the peoples of Europe by the Nazi regime. These acts were driven by Adolf Hitler’s pathological hatred of Jews and by a nation humiliated by the consequences of its defeat in World War I. His attitudes and his prejudices were made clear in his writing.

“No more than Nature desires the mating of weaker with stronger individuals, even less does she desire the blending of a higher with a lower race. Historical experience offers countless proofs of this. It shows with terrifying clarity that in every mingling of Aryan blood with that of lower peoples the result was the end of the cultured people.

All human culture, all the results of art, science and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan” [4]

Hitler acquired credibility by appealing to the basest human feelings, prejudice and discontent which resulted in the deaths of millions.

Prejudice is commonly described as an unfair and unreasonable opinion or evaluation formed without enough thought, knowledge, or reason.

Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch de Spinoza, (1632 - 1677), defines prejudice that is driven by hate, as thinking ill of others, through hate, more than is just. [5]

American psychologist, Gordon Allport, in his 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, linked prejudice to categorical thinking. Once formed, he believed that categories then became the basis for normal prejudice. [6]

Aware of the prejudice, the degradation and the evil committed against humankind, it has been said in our enlightened times, that the atrocities that occurred during World War II could never happen again. However, a bare seventy-five years later, we hear the former USA President, Barack Obama warning the world that we are at a crossroads, that we need to stand up for tolerance, moderation and respect for others, that sectarian politics could lead to chaos and violence. He comments that some countries have adopted *“an aggressive kind of nationalism”* and an *“increased resentment of minority groups. What we will see is more and more people arguing against democracy, we will see more and more people*

Dignity vs Prejudice cont.

people arguing against democracy, we will see more and more people who are looking to restrict freedom of the press, and we'll see more intolerance, more tribal divisions, more ethnic divisions, and religious divisions and more violence.” [7]

It is unfortunate that some political leaders, in rhetoric similar to the Third Reich, incite populations to see the answers to economic and security problems through an ethnocentric lens. Xenophobia and nationalism can be seen as a reaction to the rise of globalisation and the worldwide movement of refugees. In today's world, the opportunity to defend human rights and dignity is always present, particularly in the field of immigration.

Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Peace on Earth*, calls us to love our neighbour and to welcome the stranger: *“Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his/her own country; and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there”*. [8]

The underlying fear of foreigners and their cultures is a fear that is easily exploited by those with political ambitions. Their appeals to local fears and resentments override logical thought as people perceive threats of lower incomes and higher prices that they attribute to immigrants. It leads to an ethnocentric, inherent superiority in one's own culture to the detriment of those from other cultures who desperately need help and kindness.

Fr Michael Lapsley SSM, who as an opponent of apartheid, was very badly injured in a letter-bomb attack in South Africa and later formed the Institute for Healing Memories with Stephen Karakashian. Their workshops expanded to include many refugees and migrants fleeing unspeakable violence from countries outside South Africa. Lapsley wrote: *“South Africa is the most developed economy on the continent, and it has become the destination of many thousands of refugees fleeing instability, war, famine and persecution in countries as nearby as Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and as far*

away as Rwanda and Burundi. In South Africa these refugees find welcome and kindness as well as antagonism and violence. Some of our own people fear competition for scarce jobs and government services, do not understand their languages and resent what they often see as their strange ways.” [9]

Here in Aotearoa - New Zealand, on March 15th, 2019, we witnessed the rise of white supremacism culminating in the killing of fifty-one people at the Al Noor and Linwood Mosques. This type of attack has been copied by other right wing white supremacists overseas, in El Paso, USA and at a Norwegian Mosque in August 2019.

In the United States we see hatred also directed against Latino and Hispanic people, much of it fanned by political rhetoric and online radicalisation. The same rhetoric is heard against refugees in their masses trying to enter Europe to escape poverty and terrorism in their own countries.

Pope Francis spoke in 2018 thus: *“Those who, for what may be political reasons, foment fear of migrants instead of building peace are sowing violence, racial discrimination and xenophobia, which are matters of great concern for all those concerned for the safety of every human being.”* [10.]

In his message for peace in 2019, Pope Francis spoke of the challenge of good politics, writing, *“We know that the thirst for power at any price leads to abuses and injustice. Politics is an essential means of building human community and institutions, but when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole, it can become a means of oppression, marginalisation and even destruction.”* [11.]

As an example, for politicians to follow, the Pope quoted the *“Beatitudes of the Politician”* proposed by Vietnamese Cardinal Francois-Xavier Nguyen Thuan, (1928 - 2002): [12]
Blessed be the politician with a lofty sense and deep understanding of his role.
Blessed be the politician who personally exemplifies credibility.
Blessed be the politician who remains consistent.
Blessed be the politician who works for unity.

Dignity vs Prejudice cont.

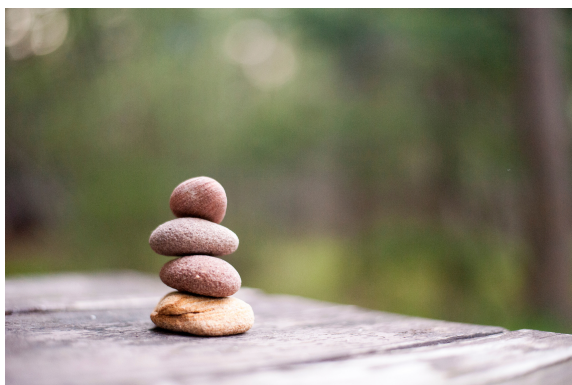
*Blessed be the politician who works to accomplish radical change.
Blessed be the politician who is capable of listening.
Blessed be the politician who is without fear.
Blessed be the politician who works for the common good and not his or her own interest.*

The second part of "Dignity vs Prejudice" will be in the June / July edition of the newsletter.

Endnotes:

- [1] 2nd Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, 29: AAS 58 (1966), 1048-1049.
- [2] 2nd Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes 26: AAS 58 (1966) 1046-1047.
- [3] Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, PCJP, Para 132, p66.
- [4] A. Hitler, Mein Kampf, Adolf Hitler, Pub 1925, Chap 11.
- [5] The Benedict de Spinoza Reader, Start Publishing LLC. 2013. Notes P2.
- [6] Gordon Allport, The Nature of Prejudice, pub Addison-Wesley, 1954, p20.
- [7] The Guardian, Saturday 1 July, 2017.
- [8] Encyclical, Pacem in Terris, Peace on Earth, Pope John XXIII, 25.
- [9] Redeeming the Past, Fr Michael Lapsley SSM. Chap13, P174, Pub 2012, Orbis Books.
- [10] World Day of Peace, 2018.
- [11] World Day of Peace 2019.
- [12] President of Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace, Conference, Padua, 3 May, 2002.

Barbara is married to Robert Te Miha, (Te Atihaunui a Pāpārangi, Ngāti Kahungunu & Ngāi Tahu) and is a member of the CHCH Catholic Commission of Justice & Peace. She thanks Mike McCoster, past member of the Commission for valuable editing advice.



Worth Reading

A Journey Home, a community poem written by six Marshallese students – ranging from high school to undergraduate – living in Springdale, Arkansas. It is a reflection on the many meanings of home: as Arkansas, as the Marshall Islands, and as Earth that needs to be protected and cultivated for the next generation. The full poem and corresponding article can be found on:

https://www.rttreversingthetrend.com/blog/a-journey-home-community-poem-by-marshallese-youthfbclid=IwAR36cq22JfYMMn4_nLswllyR9YT9VfKc0_NaYOrSwEbuq5Xsg8edMgSYvWs.

An excerpt of the poem is below:

*Men gave atom bombs
a place in world history.
But what about this home?
Smudged out of the story,
I fear people only saw the dirty red cloud,
and not the bruised Earth below.*

*In the future, will these island daughters
sink to the ocean floor?
I fear people only see a drowned land
instead of an Earth worth saving.*

*These questions stump me,
but still I stitch a map
to connect what matters most:
My family, my culture,
my Marshall Island home.*

*A map of
the Marshalls
not as a place, but a people
to guide a future generation
whose feet will meet
the islands with love,
and without fear.*

Pax Christi Australia National Conference 2021

Pax Christi Australia is holding their national conference from the 6th – 8th August 2021, at Padua College Queensland. The theme of Conference is 'A Spirituality of Peace Building: Learning from First Nations Peoples'.

'To better build peace we need a deeper spirituality of peace building. This conference seeks to deepen our spirituality through listening to and learning from First Nations peoples. Their sense of country, of connection and interconnection, of truth-telling and hopes for justice, help us learn deeper relationships of care that seek the just and peaceful thriving of all of creation.' (taken from Conference Registration Form).

The keynote speaker for the conference is Dr. Anne Pattel-Grey. Dr. Anne is an Aboriginal woman who is a descendant of the *Bidjara/Kari Kari* people in Queensland, and she is a recognised Aboriginal leader with Australia - nationally and internationally. Dr. Anne Pattel- Grey has dedicated her life to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and is a strong campaigner and lobbyist and deeply committed to seeking justice, equity and equal representation for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. Anne is also an author of "Aboriginal Spirituality".

For those interested in finding out more or registering for the conference, contact Pam Nair at pamnair@hotmail.com



Peace Prayer Flags

Recently I conducted a workshop for the Directors of Religious Studies (Primary) Conference of the Auckland Catholic Diocese. This workshop was peace prayer flag exercise which can be applicable to any age group.

The purpose of prayer flag is to write or draw your prayer on cloth and hang outside so that the wind can catch the prayer and take your prayerful intention to God and to the world. Prayer flags should technically stay up, long after writing or pictures are faded away as the prayer is still active in the world even though we can no longer read it. If you need to remove your peace prayer flag do so with reverence and ritual and perhaps bury it in a special area or burn it safely and scatter the ashes to the wind.

I invite you, to use this exercise in a group, family or individually this season and make your own peace flags to fly outside to catch the wind.

Bridget Crisp



Image: B Crisp.

DIARY DATES

- June 5th World Environment Day
- June 8th World Oceans Day
Anniversary (34 years) of NZ
becoming Nuclear Free.
- June 19th Matariki begins
- July 18th Nelson Mandela / Freedom of
Speech.
- July 30th World Day of remembering those
people who have been trafficked.

PAX CHRISTI AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Pax Christi is an independent Catholic social justice organisation. We work hard to address issues of peace and justice at a local, regional and global level.

If you want to know more about Pax Christi, to join meetings, or to set up group meetings in your area, please contact paxchristiaotearoa@gmail.com or ring 09 377 5541 / 021 729944

Pax Christi relies on volunteers & donations to enable the work to continue.

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