



Catholic Peace Movement

A Regional Section of Pax Christi USA and Pax Christi International

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Dear Bishop,

May the Peace of Christ be with you.

We, the Florida branch of Pax Christi USA, are part of the international Pax Christi community which was founded in Europe in 1945 as a reconciliation movement between the French and the Germans and has grown to over 120 member organizations in over 50 countries. We are guided by the spirituality of nonviolence and fidelity to anti-racism. Our current mission is to expand the emphasis of Catholic advocacy in Florida surrounding the issues of disarmament, reconciliation, economic and racial justice, human rights, and environmental stewardship. Our desire is to be faithful to the Gospel mandate of peacemaking and reconciliation, and to build up the beloved community here in Florida.

We thank you and the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops (FCCB) for your leadership in your diocese and advocacy on issues including the death penalty, poverty, public housing, humane immigration policies, and the protection of the unborn, and applaud the many related programs and acts of charity in your diocese and across the state. However, in “reading the signs of the times” here in Florida, and the divisive and unloving socio-political climate of our state, we all know that so much more needs to be done to create a state -wide community that models Jesus’ vision of the beloved community.

As faithful Catholics, we recognize your vocation, along with that of all the FCCB members, to be shepherds of the Church in Florida. As such, we concerned members of Pax Christi Florida approach you with a spirit of synodality and a consistent ethic of life to urge your attention to several current matters of critical importance to the state. We entreat you and your brother bishops in the FCCB to wield your moral authority in persuading Florida lawmakers to prioritize just policies on the ensuing issues:

Act justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God.

(Micah 6:8)

- **Racial Justice.** In the words of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Racism is an evil which endures in our society and our Church" (*Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism, 2018*). Racism permeates many of the injustices in Florida. For example, emboldened policies in restricting voting procedures, policing and education exacerbate already existing inequalities; and to compound matters, the alarming rise of white supremacy cloaked under the guise of Christian Nationalism misappropriates the Gospel. We implore you to continue to endorse equitable policies that correct the structural harms of racism in Florida.
- **Gun Violence.** We bemoan the escalating senseless acts of violence stemming from America's unhealthy obsession with firearms reinforced by recent Florida legislation. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated, "We support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer" (*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice, 2000*). We urge you to strengthen that conviction and take a resolute stance against gun violence by petitioning legislators to enact common-sense gun laws and by promoting the practice of nonviolence among the faithful.
- **Creation in Crisis.** Rising seas and increasingly catastrophic weather events portend an existential threat to Florida. It is more urgent than ever to heed Pope Francis' call to recognize the intrinsic value of the environment, independent of its utility to humanity. As the Holy Father reminds us, "The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor" (*Laudato Si, 2*). Meanwhile, the poor already experience mass displacement driven by environmental racism. Our state needs more policies that reflect the reality of our ecological crisis and its negative impact on Florida's most vulnerable populations and our unique Florida eco-systems. Together, we can safeguard our common home with the urgency and justice it demands.

In addition to your continued public moral support for these priorities, we implore you to counsel the pastors and the faithful in your diocese to pray, study, and act on these issues, and that you present this letter for discussion at upcoming gatherings with your brother bishops as you set priorities for FCCB's legislative goals in 2024. We also seek the opportunity for representatives of our membership to meet with you for constructive dialogue. We may be contacting you to arrange such a meeting, but you may also initiate the process by emailing us at paxchristiflorida@gmail.com.

Our members will continue to pursue justice for these and other issues through our practice of prayer, study, and action. Your support will undoubtedly strengthen our efforts. We thank you for your attention to our letter. May God bless you and your pastoral ministry, granting you the wisdom and courage to lead the faithful and all people of good will to bring to fruition the beloved community in Florida.

In the peace of Christ,

Sandra Baran
Pax Christi Florida State Coordinator

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