

Dear Archbishop Wester:

Congratulations on being named Pax Christi USA's Teacher of Peace for 2026! It is such a well-deserved honor. Ever since your first trip to Japan and your pastoral letter, "Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation toward Nuclear Disarmament," you have become a leading voice for the abolition of nuclear weapons in the Catholic Church and throughout the U.S. Establishing the "Partnership for a World without Nuclear Weapons" has extended that reach even farther. We are so pleased that you will be receiving this award in the coming months.

As you know, the threat of nuclear war seems to be increasing daily despite the 100 nations that have signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), 75 of whom have also ratified it. This year's NPT Review Conference was a disappointment once again. New START was allowed to expire. Russia, the U.S., and Israel, all nuclear states, are at war. Finland's president recently signed legislation to allow the import and transit of nuclear weapons. And Lithuanian leaders are said to have agreed to amend the constitution to allow Lithuania to host nuclear weapons in the future.

In short, we are getting as close to nuclear war as we were during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. That crisis ended with diplomacy that saved the planet, and Pope John XXIII was a key figure in making that happen. His influential role is not well known, but it was he who spoke out to set the needed moral tone that helped each side to act for peace.

This is how it developed: In fall 1962, Journalist Norman Cousins convened in Andover, MA, an informal discussion group of Soviet and American academicians. Providentially, they met on October 22, the evening Kennedy addressed the nation on the Soviet nuclear missile threat in Cuba and ordered the Navy to intercept any additional shipments.

Included among those invited by Cousins was a Vatican adviser to Pope John XXIII, Rev. Felix Mortlion. He asked if a papal intervention might help defuse the situation. Cousins phoned the White House; a Soviet member of the informal group phoned Moscow. Both got a nihil obstat. Fr. Mortlion notified the Vatican.

On October 25, Vatican Radio broadcast a strong appeal by Pope John for peace to world leaders, in particular Kennedy and Khrushchev. It stated in part: "With your hand on your conscience may each one hear the anguished cry which is raised to the skies from all parts of the earth: Peace, peace! We renew this solemn plea today."

Pravda immediately printed the Pope's message with a banner headline. And on October 28, when Khrushchev announced the pull-out of the missiles from Cuba, Pravda reprinted the Pope's message, praising the Pope's "realism on the question of peace." In turn, the United States withdrew missiles from Turkey. Hundreds of millions gave a sigh of relief, and negotiations between the US and the USSR led to the first nuclear test ban in 1963.

A decade later, Khrushchev told Cousins how much he admired Pope John, saying: "During that week of the Cuban missile crisis the Pope's appeal was a real ray of light. I was grateful for it." Several years after that, Khrushchev's son Sergey said that the words of Pope John XXIII were strongly persuasive on the consciences of people, especially those of his father and Kennedy.

With this in mind, we were thinking it might be time for something similar to happen today. Might Pope Leo XIV call for a Peace Conference to withdraw nuclear weapons from the Russian border and call for the abolition of nuclear weapons worldwide? He already suggested something along these lines at the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when he prayed that the bombings would "serve as a call to the international community to renew its commitment to pursuing lasting peace for our whole human family — 'a peace that is unarmed and disarming,' " Perhaps the Vatican or another neutral location such as Vienna or Geneva could be the venue.

Would you be able to help bring this recommendation to Pope Leo? We believe you, as a strong and highly-respected advocate for the abolition of nuclear weapons, would be the ideal diplomat to encourage Pope Leo to bring Putin, Trump, and Xi Jinping together to plan an end to nuclear weapons and to pave a new road of economic conversion from a war economy to economic development for all people everywhere. Your intercession and the strong leadership of Pope Leo could move us away from the sheer madness we are now experiencing.

The following individuals and organizations support this appeal to Pope Leo to take diplomatic leadership to prevent a nuclear holocaust.

Sincerely,

Jack Gilroy Pax Christi New York State; Veterans For Peace; Ban Killer Drones; International Peace Coalition of Schiller Institute

Rosemarie Pace, Ed.D., Coordinator of Pax Christi New York State

The following individuals and organizations support this appeal to Pope Leo to take diplomatic leadership to prevent a nuclear holocaust.

The Pax Christi New York State Council

Rosemarie Pace, Ed.D., Coordinator of Pax Christi New York State

John Amidon

Tom Casey

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Jim Albertini, PCUSA "Teacher of Peace" 2010 Award
 Fr. Roy Bourgeois, PCUSA Teacher of Peace
 Marie Dennis, PCUSA Teacher of Peace and Ambassador of Peace
 Jim Douglass, PCUSA Teacher of Peace, Author
 Fr John Heagle, Director of Priests Against Genocide
 Kathy Kelly, PCUSA "Teacher of Peace" 1998 Award
 Dr. Peter Kuznick, Professor of History and Director of Nuclear Studies Institute at American University, Washington, D.C.
 Raymond McGovern, Former CIA Analyst & Current Peace Activist
 Martin Sheen, Actor & PCUSA Teacher of Peace
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 Jim Wohlgemuth Veterans For Peace Coordinator of the Hector Black Chapter - Nashville, TN
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 Tarak Kauff New York Member of Veterans For Peace; Editor: Peace & Planet News
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 Zool Zulkowitz New York Directors Guild of America; Artistic Director, The Rising Together Theater Company; Jewish Voice for Peace; Veterans For Peace
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 Fr. Tim Taugher Pastor St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Binghamton, NY
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 Elaine Sullivan Dallas, TX M.Ed., LPC, LMFT-Counselor, former Benedictine nun
 Sr. Martha Ann Kirk Th.D., University of the Incarnate Word
 Johanna Parkinson Dallas Area Interfaith, Ret. Marketing Exec.
 E. Martin Schotz A licensed psychiatrist and author of critical political writings and his 1996 book on the assassination of John F. Kennedy, "History Will Not Absolve Us". An active advocate for peace and nuclear disarmament in Massachusetts.
 Lorin Peters Physics Teacher (The son of one of the Manhattan Project engineers. His father was recruited Sept. 1, 1942)
 Pax Christi Moderator of the Northern California Chapter.
 Pax Christi U.S. Disarmament Working Group
 Rick Halperin Director, Southern Methodist University Human Rights program
 Sylvia Demarest Retired Lawyer and Substack writer
 Roger C. Barnes Professor Emeritus, University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, TX

Bob Cushing	A Founding Father of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests Presently, Chairman of the Gospel Nonviolence Working Group
Vic Hummert	Former Maryknoll Priest and Author
Ira Helphand	Former President of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW); Co-founder Back From the Brink