

Resources for Starting Pax Christi Communities

- Local Group Organizing Packet (no charge)
- PCUSA Membership Brochure (no charge)
- Gathered in Peace: Forming Pax Christi Communities (available for free at <http://paxchristiusa1.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/gathered-in-peace.pdf>)
- The Way of Peace: Exploring Nonviolence for the 21st Century (Item No. 533-054, \$15.00 plus s/h)
- Our Prayers Rise Like Incense: Liturgies for Peace (Item No. 542-413, \$18.00 plus s/h)

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These resources are excellent either for group prayer or discussion providing an in-depth look at nonviolence in our daily lives.

Other free resources are available on our website <http://paxchristiusa.org/resources/>

Please contact [sales@paxchristiusa.org](mailto:sales@paxchristiusa.org) with any questions concerning sales and resource materials.



# How to Start a Local Pax Christi USA Chapter



*Dear Pax Christi Friends,*

*Thank you for expressing an interest in organizing a Pax Christi local community. Currently there are more than 200 local groups located throughout the country.*

*We invite you to join our vibrant grassroots movement built on communities of prayer, study and action that are exploring the transforming power of nonviolence.*

*The enclosed information is intended to assist you as you are beginning to organize and to make you aware of the Pax Christi resources available. If you have any questions or need additional assistance, please call or write. God bless you and your efforts on behalf of building peace with justice in the USA.*

### **National Office**

Pax Christi USA  
415 Michigan Ave, NE  
Suite 240  
Washington, D.C. 20017

Phone: 202-635-2741  
Email: [info@paxchristiusa.org](mailto:info@paxchristiusa.org)  
[www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org)



### **What is a Pax Christi USA Chapter?**

A Pax Christi USA community is a group of PCUSA members and friends who meet on a regular basis to pray, study and act for peace with justice. They embrace the Pax Christi USA statement of purpose and priorities. Examples of Pax Christi USA chapters are: city-wide, parish-based, religious congregation, and campus-based.

### **Benefits for Pax Christi USA Chapters:**

1. Deeper participation in the Pax Christi USA movement of prayer, study and action.
2. Special action alert mailings when action is needed as well as information about Pax Christi USA national projects and campaigns.
3. Access to computer printouts when requested.
4. Access to national staff personnel for consultation and as speakers.
5. The chance to network and share ideas with other Pax Christi USA chapters and to send the National Office information about your group's activities to include in The Peace Current.
8. Use of Pax Christi USA as part of the name of your group.

### **Some Responsibilities of Pax Christi USA Chapters:**

1. Requiring all members to be dues paying members of PCUSA
2. Meeting on a regular basis (weekly, monthly, etc.) for prayer, study and action focusing on one or more of Pax Christi USA's priority areas.
3. Contacting new Pax Christi USA members in the area who want to join a local Pax Christi USA chapter.
4. Participating in regional Pax Christi USA structures if the group is located within an organized Pax Christi USA region.

# How To Start

## All You Need is a Few Good Friends

A good way to get off the ground is to bring together some like-minded people interested in exploring the possibility of starting a Pax Christi USA Chapter. This does not need to be a large group.

You can contact the National Office for a list of Pax Christi members in your area. Otherwise make use of your own network of friends who share your values and desires to do something about peace and justice. Bring these folks together in an informal gathering to see if they would be interested in organizing an inquiry meeting to explore the possibilities of starting a Pax Christi USA chapter in your area.

## Laying The Groundwork

Once your small group decides to organize the inquiry meeting, the most important thing to do is get the word out. Personal invitation is by far the best way to bring people to this first meeting. Face-to-face invitations are best; phone calls are second best; and personal letters can also be effective.

If you decide to put an announcement in your church bulletin, local newspaper, diocesan newspaper, or school newspaper, be careful about the way you phrase your invitation. An announcement that reads, "There will be a meeting of all those interested in joining a Pax Christi group..." will guarantee that no one will show up.

A better approach would be, "Are you interested in learning more about peace and justice in the Catholic tradition? There will be an informational meeting with discussion sponsored by members of Pax Christi USA, the national Catholic peace movement on ... from 7:30 - 9:00pm at ... If you are interested but unable to attend, please contact ..."

## Planning Your Inquiry Meeting

It is important that your first meeting be held at a neutral location that will not inhibit people from coming. Never hold this kind of meeting in a home; try to acquire a room at a library, school or church. Make sure to consult your community calendar in order to avoid dates which might result in a lot of conflicts.

This first meeting should not be a business meeting but an informal gathering to allow people to get to know one another and explore the possibilities of forming a Pax Christi USA Chapter. It should include the following elements:

Opening Prayer (5 min.) - It is important the people realize that this is a faith-based organization. Prayer also helps to center people's attention.

Introduction (10-20 min.) - Depending on the size of the group, you might be able to give each person an opportunity to introduce themselves and share why they came.

Program (30 min.) - The ideal would be to have a program on a peace and justice topic of interest in the local community that would also raise the questions of starting a

faith-based peace community. Great care should be given that this be well organized and not too long.

Group Discussion (30 min.) - Have some discussion questions ready that will allow people to surface issues and concerns important to them. Make sure that someone writes down all of the input - preferably on newsprint - to be used at later meetings.

Announcements (5 min.) - Before you officially close the meeting, make sure to announce the time and place of your next meeting. Also make sure that everyone puts their name, address and phone number on the sign-up lists. Thank everyone for coming.

Closing Prayer (5 min.) - Try to include in the final prayer some of the concerns and issues that were brought up during the meeting. If the group seems ready, you might want to ask for prayers of petition and thanks from the group.

Social - Leave time for people to socialize.

It would be a good idea to have a refreshment table set up with coffee, tea and some snacks at this first meeting. If possible, set up a Pax Christi USA information table. The National Office can send you some free material to include on this table.

It is very important that you start and finish on time. When inviting people to the meeting, clearly state the time commitment and keep to it. This first meeting should not be more than one-and-a-half hours long. People will be less willing to make a commitment to come to the meeting if they

do not know how much time is required.

## Follow-Up Is Important

Follow-up to this first meeting is crucial. Make an effort to contact everyone who signed up at the inquiry meeting. Ask if they need a ride to the next meeting. Send a letter outlining the agenda for the next two or three meetings. (The agenda for the second meeting should include some of the major concerns surfaced in the inquiry meeting.) The schedule of meeting times, dates, places and content helps people see that your group is organized and serious about itself.

## Don't Get Discouraged

It is important to note that most Pax Christi USA local chapters average 10-15 members in size. And yet, these small groups are having powerful influence on their local communities. And as Margaret Mead pointed out so clearly, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world... Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

