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## Interview: Sister Mary Lou Kownacki

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# Pax Christi does not believe Gulf war meets the criteria for a just war

*Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, is the national coordinator of Pax Christi U.S.A. Pax Christi is an international organization of the international Catholic Peace Movement. The organization was started immediately after World War II, as an effort at reconciliation between German and French Catholics, by a French bishop who had been imprisoned in a concentration camp, Bishop Theas. It was begun in the United States in 1972.*

*Sister Kownacki was interviewed on Jan. 30 by Marianna Wertz.*

**EIR:** Our readers identify themselves generally as patriotic Americans and Christians. Our editorial stance has been in opposition to this Middle East war. What are the reasons Pax Christi has called on Christians to examine their consciences on this war?

**Sister Kownacki:** Pax Christi doesn't believe it's a just war or a moral war. We've maintained that position since we introduced troops into the area. We feel it does not meet the traditional criteria set up by the Catholic Church for participation in warfare.

**EIR:** That would be those outlined by St. Augustine and others?

**Sister Kownacki:** Yes, and borrowed from Plato and Cicero and expounded on by St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

A good portion of our [Pax Christi's] population is pacifist, and would believe that all war is immoral, because we believe it goes against the basic teachings of Jesus for loving your enemy and doing good to those who hurt you; the commandment you shall not kill; the belief that there's only one God and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

The way, though, that we have been trying to enter the dialogue is with people who still would uphold the just war theory, and would say there are times when Christians are permitted to fight. We do not believe that this war meets the just war criteria, and I can tell you why.

**EIR:** Please do.

**Sister Kownacki:** We don't think the principle of last resort was met. We don't think economic sanctions were given enough time and we don't think that all diplomatic efforts and negotiations were exhausted. We feel that our administration substituted ultimatums for negotiations. They publicly said

they would not negotiate or compromise.

We feel the principle of just cause is suspect. That is the principle that one can only go to war in self-defense or to prevent aggression, to defend a neighbor. We think the signals coming from the administration are mixed on the claim we're there to liberate Kuwait. They also say we are there to maintain our lifestyle.

We find this liberation of Kuwait curiously selective. In fact, we wonder why we have responded to this invasion and not to so many others that have taken place around the globe when greedy nations invade weaker nations. It seems very selective and self-serving.

**EIR:** Would you include Lithuania and Latvia?

**Sister Kownacki:** Right. We point out, like many others, that we waited 45 years to contain the Soviet Union and there were many Soviet invasions during this period, many abuses of human rights, and we did not respond with the same kind of force that we are doing right now.

**EIR:** Has Pax Christi then said what it believes are the real reasons for this invasion?

**Sister Kownacki:** From our point of view, we think it has more to do with maintaining the American lifestyle, with insuring the flow of oil, and we don't think that's a just reason for going to war. You can't go to war over another country's natural resources.

It's a suspect area. And in order to be a just war, you have to be absolutely certain that all these criteria are being fulfilled. There can be no questions, no uncertainty.

**EIR:** Has there been a war in the 20th century that Pax Christi would have called just?

**Sister Kownacki:** I can't speak [on that]. I've only been in Pax Christi for 20 years. We certainly did not think the Vietnam War was just. We did oppose the invasion of Panama and the bombing of Libya.

We also would hold in the nuclear age, we don't think any war is just, because the weapons of mass destruction make the probability of success, which is another criterion for the just war theory, very tenuous.

**EIR:** Or at least difficult to define as a success under such conditions?

**Sister Kownacki:** That's right. We also don't feel the principle of proportionality is clear here, that the good achieved through the war will outweigh the evil. There is tremendous cost in terms of human lives lost, the refugees that are being created, the terrorist acts that are being launched, the land and property that are being destroyed, the devastation of the Gulf. The ecological damage could be colossal; it's already begun.

And we hear threats of fire-bombing, chemical weapons. Today, I understand someone in Congress introduced the idea that we should be using tactical nuclear warheads.

All of these would put the cost of war as escalated to a tremendous degree, and therefore we don't feel this would be a good that would outweigh the destruction.

**EIR:** Do you foresee dire consequences for economies of the developing sector?

**Sister Kownacki:** I think so. Yes, and even in the United States itself.

**EIR:** Pax Christi members have begun civil disobedience in the nation's capital. Do you plan to continue that?

**Sister Kownacki:** That was the call to religious leaders. We put out a call to our bishop members—we have 92 bishops that are members and we have 250 religious communities of men and women that are members. We put out a call to these and to some theologians in the Catholic Church, asking them in case war broke out to come to Washington the Tuesday following the outbreak of war. We had response from 82 of these religious leaders. Of course some couldn't come because it was very quick. Nobody knew when war was going to break out. They were joined by about 400 other people in the Washington area.

We had a press conference there, and the transcript is available.

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## Documentation

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### Pax Christi calls for Gulf cease-fire

*Pax Christi U.S.A., self-identified as the National Catholic Peace Movement, released the following statement on Jan. 22, 1991.*

Pax Christi U.S.A. believes that the Persian Gulf War is an affront to all humanity, especially the poor, an assault on creation and an act of disobedience to God. We decry the violence that has already been unleashed and have initiated

this time of prayer and resistance to express our opposition to the war in a public, nonviolent way. In addition to the prayer service and witness here in Washington, where over 70 Catholic leaders are being joined by religious leaders from other denominations, there will be similar Pax Christi-initiated events in other cities across the country.

The military actions of the past few days fill us with deep sadness and dread.

The brutal, devastating and relentless attacks unleashed by the United States against Iraqi cities mean psychological damage, physical injury, and death to countless military and civilian victims even as spokespersons for the Pentagon and the administration censor the news and project the facade of a "sterilized" war.

The destruction by Iraq of oil fields in Kuwait threatens global ecological and economic catastrophe. This war has set in motion a reign of terror that could escalate into chemical, biological, and nuclear warfare, acts of terrorism worldwide, and widening military involvement of other countries in the Middle East.

Pax Christi believes that war should have been averted and calls for an immediate cease-fire and an openness to negotiations. Technologies of death will never bring about peace. Ultimatums and inflexible calls for unconditional surrender are immoral and may intensify Arab resentment and make it much more difficult to establish peace.

We implore the international community to intercede on behalf of sanity. We call for strict adherence to the Geneva accords, for the immediate placing of U.N. peacekeeping forces between the warring nations and for prompt international aid to all war refugees. We call for the establishment of zones of peace where civilians will be given sanctuary from the ravages of war. We demand that all warring nations respect the integrity of the men and women who refuse to fight on the grounds of conscience. And we insist that the United States agree immediately to participate in an international peace conference on the Middle East.

Our prayers are with the people of the Middle East and with the armed forces involved who bear the brunt of unspeakable violence. Every day casualties mount. As the Catholic Peace Movement, we call upon Catholic people to join with us in these prayers and to resist the war. Specifically we ask the Catholic Church leadership to publicly judge the morality of the conflict and to encourage citizens, both civilian and military, to act in response to conscience regarding the war.

Pax Christi U.S.A. rejects the new world order described by current events, a world order based on brute force and the strength of arms. We have instead our own vision of a world order that ensures the essentials of a fully human, peaceful life for all God's children. We mourn now with the poor of our world who, because of this conflict, will wait even longer for food, clothing, shelter, health care and education as we pour billions of dollars into the desert sands.