



+August 6, 2024

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

May the peace of our Lord be with each of you.

A year ago, I traveled with a delegation from Seattle and the Archdiocese of Santa Fe to the exact spots where nuclear bombs fell in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We were part of a pilgrimage of peace to Japan led by Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe. Archbishop Wester has been dedicated to shedding light on nuclear disarmament and calling for change across the United States. He invited me on this pilgrimage because I, too, am dedicated to peace, and here in the Archdiocese of Seattle, we have the largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, sitting on submarines in Kitsap County.

The commemoration ceremonies in Japan also inspired me because of the commitment of so many people who have dedicated themselves to the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Together we embarked on a pilgrimage to deepen our understanding of the devastation of nuclear weapons, to forge partnerships with the bishops of Japan who share our urgent desire for peace, and to echo the call for peace from Jesus Christ. Please read more about the Pilgrimage for Peace in this [digital booklet](#) and see our [joint-letter invitation](#) to other religious organizations to join the Partnership for a World Without Nuclear Weapons.

The devastation – physical, emotional, ecological – from these two primitive nuclear bombs was truly horrific. Words cannot fully describe the powerful experience I, along with my fellow pilgrims, had visiting these sites. Knowing that we continue to manufacture these weapons, refining their destructive power, is beyond alarming. Today's numerous nuclear weapons will destroy our planet and our human family many times over. Many times over. Yet we do very little to advocate for this. It is sinful for us to turn a blind eye to this reality. Pope Francis goes even further by stating: "The use of nuclear weapons, as well as their mere possession, is immoral."

Learning about the unimaginable pain and suffering from survivors – known as Hibakusha – who lost everything in that flash of light solidified my resolve to bring attention to this issue and further the clarion call for peace.

Nuclear disarmament is a complicated issue, I am well aware, and may be difficult for some to comprehend why we must do something now – especially as we witness the devastation in Ukraine. I assure you, there is no better time.

In addressing diplomats accredited to the Holy See in January, Pope Francis declared, "I once more affirm the immorality of manufacturing and possessing nuclear weapons."

In an address last September to the United Nations, Vatican ambassador Archbishop Paul Gallagher pointed out that “the risk of nuclear war is at its highest in generations, featuring unconscionable threats of nuclear use, while an arms race runs unabated. ... The world must reverse course. Pope Francis insists that, ‘the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative.’”

How can we respond to this moral and humanitarian imperative?

Jesus Christ gave us the gift of peace, and today I encourage each of you reading this to reflect on what that means to you. While we can certainly do more to advocate for a world without nuclear weapons – which is the foundation and goal of our partnership with the bishops of Japan – we must start with our own hearts.

Peace in our world starts with each of us as individuals. Peace is rooted in our relationship with God. As the Book of Judges says, “the Lord is peace” (Judges 6:24). Peace rooted in God extends to our relationships within our own families and in our communities. Peace is nourished through us at work, at the grocery store, while sitting in traffic, and in all the mundane moments in our lives each day. Peace looks like respectful dialogue. Peace looks like unity. Peace looks like inclusion. Peace looks like learning about those who are different than you. There are many faces of peace, and we have the opportunity to reflect each one as we live out the joy of the Gospel each day.

We will be celebrating an annual Mass for Peace at noon August 9th at St. James Cathedral, and I personally invite each of you. Come pray with us as an emboldened community calling for peace as we remember all those impacted by nuclear weapons. As always, I remain,

In The Heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul D. Etienne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and "E".

Most Rev. Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Seattle