News

A Japanese child squats and presses her palms together and thumbs to her forehead in front

A girl prays after releasing a paper lantern on the Motoyasu River facing the gutted Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima, Japan, Aug 6, 2020, the 75th anniversary of the United States dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Several U.S. bishops are undertaking a pilgrimage of peace to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to advocate for nuclear disarmament. (OSV News photo/Yuriko Nakao, Reuters)

Gina Christian

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

## Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

July 20, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Two U.S. archbishops are leading a "Pilgrimage of Peace" to Japan, hoping to promote global nuclear disarmament.

Archbishop John C. Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Archbishop Paul D. Etienne of Seattle are traveling July 31 - Aug. 12 to Japan's cities of Tokyo, Akita, Kyoto, Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Joining the archbishops are representatives from archdiocesan offices and various organizations focusing on nuclear disarmament and social justice. Funding for the trip is underwritten by "grants and personal contributions," rather than archdiocesan funds, according to a July 18 news release from the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

Participants are escorted by Hirokazu Miyazaki, anthropology professor at Northwestern University, and a peace correspondent for Nagasaki, appointed by that city to speak on behalf of its residents for nuclear disarmament.

The pilgrimage features a "Novena for Nuclear Disarmament," prayers for which are available in English on the trip's website.

According to the website, the pilgrimage's mission is to "establish an ecclesial and personal relationship with the bishops of Japan to work toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, expressing our heartfelt sorrow for the devastating experiences endured by their nation."

An estimated 140,000 people were killed in Hiroshima during World War II when the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Aug. 6, 1945, followed by a second atomic bomb Aug. 9, 1945, on Nagasaki that left 74,000 people dead. Survivors, known as "hibakusha," faced numerous physical and psychological ailments in the bombings' aftermath, which led to Japan's unconditional surrender to the U.S. and its allies.

Advertisement

In the release, Wester said that he hoped during the pilgrimage to "encourage conversation about universal, verifiable nuclear disarmament and to walk together toward a new future of peace, a new promised land of peace, a new culture of peace and nonviolence where we all might learn to live in peace as sisters and brothers on this beautiful planet, our common home."

"God calls us to build a global community where the whole human family can flourish," added Etienne, according to the release. "Let us keep educating ourselves, praying for peace, and appealing for verifiable nuclear disarmament, which reflects our Catholic teachings and is the path for the common good."

In May, both bishops joined Archbishop Peter Michiaki Nakamura of Nagasaki and Bishop Alexis Mitsuru Shirahama of Hiroshima in issuing a letter to leaders of the Group of Seven nations, as the G7 met in Hiroshima, calling on them to take "concrete steps" toward ending the use of nuclear weapons.

"As the Roman Catholic spiritual leaders of the diocese with the most spending on nuclear weapons in the United States (Santa Fe, NM), the diocese with the most

deployed strategic nuclear weapons in the United States (Seattle, WA), and the only two dioceses in the world to have suffered atomic attacks (Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan), we are compelled by providence to speak out," the bishops said in the May 15 letter.

"Rather than viewing the war in Ukraine as an overwhelming impediment toward making substantial progress, we view it instead as a clear demonstration of the absolute need to do so," the letter stated.

In their letter to the G7, the bishops also emphasized "that serious talks should be restored" between the U.S. and Russia to renew the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty -- Russia's participation in New START was suspended by its president, Vladimir Putin, in February -- and called on leaders to "enter into serious multilateral negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament."

A version of this story appeared in the **Aug 4-17, 2023** print issue under the headline: US archbishops lead ‘pilgrimage of peace’ to Japan, call for disarmament.