

9th August 2026

Hiroshima & Nagasaki 81st Anniversary Memorial Service, 3 pm.

Abbey Peace Obelisk, Sumpter Yard, St Albans.

Theme: Against nuclear proliferation.



Assemble c 2.50 pm at the Peace Pillar

3 o'clock – Abbey bells

Speaker: Welcome

We are here today to remember the past and to pray for the present time and the future of our world.

It is 81 years since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 of which Pope St John Paul II said that: '[to] remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war. To remember Hiroshima is to commit to peace' (*50th anniversary of the end of WWII*).

And we gather on this spot because here, in St Albans, in 1945 the then Dean of our cathedral, Dean Thicknesse*, courageously refused to join in with the celebratory ringing of the city's church bells, mindful of the terrible destruction and suffering caused by those atomic bombs.

In gratitude for Dean Thicknesse's compassion, the people of Japan gave the Peace Obelisk to the people of St Albans.

We pray for nuclear disarmament and for the courage to be peacemakers.

(Speaker) From the testimony of Hiroshima survivor, Toshiko Saeki

Nuclear war has nothing good. Whether you win or lose, it leaves you feeling futile with only your rage and with fear about the aftereffects of radioactivity. The survivors have to live with this fear. At times I have thought I should have died then, it would have been better. But I must live for the sake of the people, all the people who lost their lives then.

So I relate my experiences hoping that my talk would discourage people from making war. Our experience must not be forgotten. What we believed in during the war turned out to be worth nothing. We don't know to whom we should turn our rage. I went through hell on earth. Hiroshima should not be repeated again.

Opening Prayers

God our creator and sustainer, we gather to pray as a broken people who today remember the darkness and the shadow of death and destruction caused by nuclear weapons. We know that we deal falsely with the world and with ourselves, healing wounds too lightly by saying "peace, peace" when there is no peace. Let there be sown in us anew the unity, the light and the peace which passes all understanding. Be with us today and keep our minds and hearts in you and in your peace.

Group A: O God, tender and just, the names of Hiroshima and Nagasaki cut through our denial that we are capable of destroying the earth and all that dwell therein. Forgive us - and help us to always remember.

Group B: We must remember because this must never happen again. We must remember because you would have us live in harmony with each other, seeing the joy of your creation in our sisters and brothers.

Group A: Holy God, God of all the ages, lead us from death to life, to the stockpiling of hope, and of possibilities, and of love, rather than the stockpiling of weapons and of hate.

Group B: We pray for the healing of the earth and of its peoples, especially for our sisters and brothers who live with the fear of aerial bombardment** and of drone attack.

Group A: Lord Jesus, you said 'Blessed are the peacemakers'.

Group B: We pray for all peacemakers, especially those who risk their own liberty to non-violently resist the preparations for nuclear war.

Group A: Lord Jesus, you said 'First seek the kingdom of God and His justice, and the rest will be given to you'.

Group B: We pray for all investors and manufacturers in the nuclear industry, that they will divest and transfer their money and skills to bringing life not death.

Amen

Gong interlude

Litany: the response is 'Lord have Mercy'

Group A: For the times we have chosen vengeance over justice:

All: Lord have mercy

Group A: For the times we have stored up violence in our hearts:

All: Lord have mercy

Group A: For the times we have failed to be peacemakers:

All: Lord have mercy

Group A: For the times we have chosen fear over openness:

All: Lord have mercy

Group A: For the times we have neglected to enter into dialogue:

All: Lord have mercy

Group A: For the times we have failed to be reconciled with others:

All: Lord have mercy

Gong interlude

All: Help us to imagine that another world is possible and guide our actions towards the peace you envision, the peace you have already given us. In the name of the One who came so that we might have life, and have it abundantly, we pray.

Psalm 62

(All)

In God alone there is rest for my soul,
From him comes my safety;
He alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold
So that I stand unshaken.

Reader

MESSAGE OF POPE LEO XIV FOR THE 59th WORLD DAY OF PEACE

1st JANUARY 2026

Dear brothers and sisters, whether we have the gift of faith or feel we lack it, let us open ourselves to peace! Let us welcome it and recognize it, rather than believing it to be impossible and beyond our reach. Peace is more than just a goal; it is a presence and a journey. Even when it is endangered within us and around us, like a small flame threatened by a storm, we must protect it, never forgetting the names and stories of those who have borne witness to it. Peace is a principle that guides and defines our choices.....

The peace of the risen Jesus is unarmed, because his was an unarmed struggle in the midst of concrete historical, political and social circumstances. Christians must together bear prophetic witness to this novelty, mindful of the tragedies in which they have too often been complicit.



(All) Prayer for Peace

Almighty God

We thank you for your gift of peace.

Your peace is 'unarmed' and 'disarming'

not victory or defeat,

but fraternity and dialogue,

the fruit of justice and forgiveness.

Open our eyes to see the world -

not from the viewpoint of the mighty

but from that of the widow, the orphan,

the stranger, the wounded child

the exile and the fugitive.

We pray for change to come -

a new era, the dawn of your kingdom of justice and peace.

Disarm our hearts, God, that we

may have peace in ourselves

and bring that gift to others. (Provided by Pax Christi)

Reader: Creator God Your world is precious but human folly threatens its very existence. We pray for those whose lives have been destroyed by nuclear weapons and nuclear testing.

Reader: We pray for those denied the essentials of life when money is squandered on nuclear weapons production.

Reader: We pray that our Church will speak to the world with clarity and wisdom and work with world leaders to ban the development, possession and use of nuclear weapons.

All: We commit ourselves to work for a world without nuclear weapons. We pray in hope for a world built on just relations and co-operation between people who wish to live.

(The above prayers were provided by Pax Christi)

All: We pray too for those trapped in violence in Palestine and Israel, Lebanon, Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen and throughout the world.

All: **Our Father....**

Speaker: Closure

Thank you for being part of this gathering. Please take an origami crane and a Pax Christi prayer card with you. Mindful of Pope Leo's guidance that we never forget the names and stories of those who have borne witness to peace we remember Bruce Kent (22/06/1929 – 08/06/2022) who was a courageous campaigner for disarmament and for peace and also Mary Corbett (31/10/1942 – 28/01/2023) who was instrumental in establishing this peace event, RIP.

You are very welcome to join us in the Abbot's Kitchen.

Notes

*A news article about Dean Thicknesse's response to the dropping of the atom bombs can be found at <https://www.theguardian.com/century/1940-1949/Story/0,,127725,00.html>.

** The first part of this litany was largely written by Rev. Loey Powell, United Church of Christ.

During and after the service Origami Peace Cranes will be offered to those attending or passing. The Origami Cranes gained worldwide recognition through the efforts of Sadako Sasaki, a Japanese girl who became a victim of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War II. As she battled leukaemia, she found solace in folding paper cranes, hoping to fold 1,000 of them to fulfil an ancient legend that granted a wish to those who did so. Sadako's story and her association with the origami crane inspired millions, transforming it into a symbol of hope amidst tragedy.

See also:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/peace/documents/20251208-messaggio-pace.html>

<https://theelders.org/news/story-sadako-sasaki-and-hiroshima-peace-cranes>

<https://theelders.org/news/nuclear-threat-must-not-fade-public-consciousness> AND
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwEMpcHdPxY>