NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Pax Christi USA names new executive director

Dennis Sadowski Catholic News Service | Oct. 24, 2011

WASHINGTON -- Helping people understand how the sin of racism undermines society's ability to overcome violence and economic injustice is the top priority for Sr. Patricia Chappell as the new executive director of Pax Christi USA.

"People really have to acknowledge that racism is a deep integral sin in our country and we have to admit it continues to be an institutional sin," Sr. Patricia told Catholic News Service on Oct. 24, shortly after the organization announced she would succeed David Robinson as head of the nationwide Catholic peace organization.

"We have to acknowledge that, but then we have to be able to find ways to move forward, not just get stuck on the emotional piece of it all," said Sr. Patricia, a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Connecticut province.

Her appointment closes Pax Christi's year of transition, which also saw the organization move its national headquarters from Erie, Pa., to Washington in order to work more closely with many Catholic and other faith-based organizations on a variety of justice issues.

The role of racism in injustice has been a concern of Pax Christi USA for 20 years and has been the motivating factor for the organization's leader to undertake a years-long initiative to become a multicultural, anti-racist Catholic peace and justice movement.

Sr. Patricia also said she wants to reach people in the pews to understand that Pax Christi's work is rooted in Catholic social teaching.

"We have to try to find some kind of way of having the priorities make sense to the ordinary people in the pew. We've got to move it from an abstract theoretical concept to making it real for the people in the pews and trying to find practical ways where we can invite people to be part of this movement," she explained.

Sr. Patricia comes to Pax Christi USA after serving a variety or leadership positions within her religious community and in youth ministry and programs in several settings. She currently works as a program specialist at the Takoma Park Recreation Center in Takoma Park, Md., and earlier worked with young people in youth centers in Hyattsville, Md., and as director of youth ministry at Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian Church in Washington. From 1981 to 1989 she worked with Shalom Inc. in Philadelphia, providing substance-abuse intervention services for African-American youth and their families.

From 2001 to 2006, Sr. Patricia was on the leadership team of her religious community. She also was president of the National Black Sisters' Conference based in Washington from 1996 to 2001. In addition, she is co-coordinator of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur's Anti-Racism Team and is on the board of trustees of Trinity Washington University.

She holds a degree in psychology and social work from St. Joseph College in West Hartford, Conn., and a master of social work from The Catholic University of America.

A lifelong Catholic, Sr. Patricia was educated at her parish school in New Haven, Conn., St. Martin de Porres, which served the African-American community. She said she was influenced to join her order by a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur whom she met after elementary school, Sr. William Virginia (Dolores Harrall), now deceased.

"I never thought I could be a sister because I had never seen a black sister," she said. "I had never seen a sister who looked like me."

She said was impressed by the way the sisters treated the students and involved parents in decision-making. "It wasn't a top-down kind of thing," she said. "It was what was best for the children."

That approach is what fuels Sr. Patricia's desire to help Pax Christ's programs reach across economic and racial lines.

"From my perspective, you bring people to the table and say 'What are your needs?' In speaking about the needs, we look at it that there's an abundance of resources so there's enough for each person as opposed to saying there's a scarcity so we're in a competitive mode," she said.

She was to begin her new position Nov. 1.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/03/2016 - 00:40*): http://ncronline.org/news/pax-christi-usa-names-new-executive-director