

PCAN Nuclear Weapons Survey 2025 Executive Summary

Inspired by the forthright witness of Pope Francis, the leadership of Archbishop John C. Wester, the guidance of IPPNW's Dr. Ira Helfand, the earnest work of ICAN and many other groups, and the long-standing efforts of Pax Christi, we have undertaken a survey of North Americans¹ (United States and Canada) on their knowledge, attitudes, and activities about nuclear weapons, which we consider to be the “most serious existential threat to humankind.”²

Our primary purpose was to discover what we could do to help mobilize North American Catholics to support and work for the global elimination of nuclear weapons. Our respondents are not a random sample: they responded at their discretion to invitations from many collaborating organizations (many, but not all are Catholic). About 85% identified as Catholic, of which almost 20% were nuns, priests, or other religious. We purposefully also sought responses from non-Catholics in order to have a comparison sample from outside the Church.

Our Key Findings

- Of our total respondents, over 85% are “greatly” or “very” concerned about nuclear weapons, while slightly over 40% have done work (very broadly defined) to eliminate them. When asked if they'd like to be more involved in efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons, only 15% declined, whereas over 40% said yes and the other 40+% were unsure.
- Of those who have not engaged in such work, most cite “powerlessness” and “too busy” as their reason.
- Of those 40+% who have worked to eliminate nuclear weapons, their activities were in political, educational, and spiritual realms roughly equally, with many working in several. Nearly half of them said they were involved in planning such work in the future. Addendum A offers an extensive and inspiring compendium of these activities.
- Of those who have worked for nuclear weapons abolition, the most cited encouragements were Pope Francis' teachings, Archbishop Wester's pastoral letter, materials from Pax Christi, and the work of their companions in the field.
- Surprisingly, Catholics and non-Catholics were about equally aware of Pope Francis' pronouncement that possession of nuclear weapons is immoral: roughly 70% aware, 30% unaware.
- For those who are working for nuclear weapons' abolition, the obstacle most commonly cited (cited by nearly 90%) was public lack of awareness of the threat. However, nuclear weapons' lack of status as a “pro- life” issue was nearly as important (cited by nearly 80%). Lack of coverage in the Catholic press was cited by nearly 60%, while “not hearing about this from my priest or bishop” was cited by over 55%.

Our Conclusions

1. There is great concern over the existential threat of nuclear weapons: it is shown by nearly 85% of our respondents.
2. The lack of discussion of the threat of nuclear weapons in public and by religious leaders and press is a key discouragement to action. Nevertheless, nearly half are willing to do more to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons.
3. There is significant potential to mobilize this action with effective leadership from Church religious and lay leaders; people have responded very positively to such leadership, for example from Pope Francis, Archbishop Wester, and Pax Christi.

1. PCAN has contacted only English speakers in the United States and Canada due to our own limitation to the English language.

2. Archbishop John C. Wester; Address to the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) at the United Nations, December 1, 2023