



Archdiocese of Santa Fe
Office of Communications/Social Media
4000 St. Joseph's Place NW | Albuquerque, NM 87120-1714
Leslie M. Radigan, Director
Voice: 505.831.8180
lradigan@asfnm.org | archdiosf.org

**Op-Ed by Most Reverend John C. Wester,
Archbishop of Santa Fe**

**80 Years:
The Immorality of Nuclear Weapons
August 6, 2025**

Greetings New Mexicans. The Lord's blessings upon you. I am writing to you from Hiroshima, Japan, on the 80th anniversary of its horrific atomic bombing. All wars are against Christ's teachings. Two wrongs (including Japanese atrocities in WWII) never make a right.

I am here with Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago. Cardinal Robert McElroy of Washington, DC, Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle and our brother Japanese bishops, to commemorate the dead and to honor the living *Hibakusha* (the aging atomic survivors). We especially congratulate the Hibakusha organization *Nihon Hidankyo* for winning the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize.

But we also look into the future. We are in a new nuclear arms race with multiple nuclear actors, new cyber weapons, and artificial intelligence. Robert McNamara, Defense Secretary during the Cuban Missile Crisis, said we survived only by luck. Luck is not a sustainable survival strategy. Nuclear weapons are indiscriminate killers; therefore, they are immoral. Nuclear disarmament is a profound pro-life issue.

The word "deterrence" is always used to justify nuclear weapons. But that one word is only a half-truth. The U.S. and Russia have always rejected minimal deterrence to also include nuclear warfighting capabilities that can end civilization overnight. That is why both sides have thousands of nuclear weapons instead of only a few hundred. That is why the U.S. has a \$2 trillion "modernization" program to keep nuclear weapons forever.

This is contrary to the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty (NPT), in which the non-weapon states pledged to never acquire nuclear weapons. In return, the nuclear powers promised to enter into negotiations leading to disarmament, which has never been honored. From that betrayal sprang the 2021 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which the Vatican was the first nation-state to sign and ratify. The nuclear weapons powers bitterly oppose the TPNW even though it does nothing more than ban nuclear weapons just like previous treaties banned biological and chemical weapons. But nuclear weapons must be banned, in a universal, verifiable manner!

Our late Pope Francis led the Catholic Church in a transformational change from conditional acceptance of so-called deterrence. On the 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing he declared that even the mere possession of nuclear weapons was immoral. A decade later, this immorality runs even deeper with the exorbitant sums of money being diverted into nuclear weapons, while taxes are cut for the rich amidst rapidly increasing economic inequality and homelessness. This is deeply immoral and counter to the Catholic Church's teachings on social justice.

A prime example of this immorality is right in our own back yard. A whopping one billion dollars is being added to the Los Alamos National Laboratory's (LANL's) annual \$4 billion nuclear weapons program, largely for the expanded production of plutonium "pit" bomb cores. However, no future pit production is to maintain the existing stockpile. Instead it is all for new-design nuclear weapons that could prompt the U.S. to return to testing, which would have severe proliferation consequences. At the same time, science and nonproliferation programs are being cut while research on renewables is completely zeroed out.

Jobs are often cited as justification for expanding nuclear weapons programs. I believe that the jobs at LANL and Sandia laboratories are better directed toward peaceful purposes. Besides, nuclear weapons "modernization" diverts money from helping the poor and feeding the hungry. Why is it that New Mexico remains dead last in the quality of public education and the lives of our children?

In 1961 President Kennedy declared to the United Nations General Assembly:

"Today, every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable. Every man, woman and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or by madness. The weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us."

Or perhaps Omar Bradley, a five-star general, said it best:

"Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount."

Like Bradley, I close with the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the Children of God." We will abolish nuclear weapons, or they will abolish us. Eighty years - - it is long past time for these deeply immoral weapons to go!

Most Reverend John C. Wester,
Archbishop of Santa Fe
(the "Sacred Faith" of St. Francis the peacemaker)