



ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
**JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY
OF CREATION COMMISSION**
AUTUMN ASSEMBLY 2011

Big Society? - Fair Society - Just Society?
Guest Speakers - Francis Davis & Alison Gelder

The Southwark JPIC 2011 Autumn Assembly was held at the Amigo Hall, St George's Cathedral on Saturday 22nd October.

We were particularly pleased to welcome Bishop Patrick Lynch and Bishop Howard Tripp. As well as our keynote speakers Daniel Hale, Progressio's Campaign Officer, joined us to give the day a wider world perspective and Barbara Kentish, from Westminster J&P was with us to launch the 100 Days of Peace campaign in the diocese. We were delighted to welcome over 50 J&P supporters from around the diocese and further a field to the meeting.



The morning session started with an opening liturgy provided by Mike Legrue followed by lively table discussions, which resulted in some interesting feedback, facilitated by Phil Kerton.

A wide range of topics emerged, many around the subject of the day. The growing need to support the homeless, refugees and sanctuary seekers both through fundraising and through practical support. Initiatives to make these people more welcome in our communities and, working on from this, the benefits all can gain from wider involvement in inter-faith groups and events.

The need to provide support for prisoners and those leaving custody was also raised along with a growing need for debt counselling.

The establishment and development of Credit Unions can go a long way towards driving loan sharks out of local communities.

Our first speaker was Daniel Hale accompanied by Semhar Mengis, one of Progressio's young volunteers. They gave us a world view speaking on 'Building the Really Big Society'.



Different societies are different because of historical, cultural, demographic, topographic distinctions: there's no one-size-fits all. Daniel felt that there is a paradox at the heart of "Big Society" – it's a UK-based idea, its borders are our borders but the implications of the Big Society go far beyond the white cliffs of Dover. The Big Society, if we're to really take it seriously, can only be global.

Our back yard extends around the world thanks to communications technologies. Every action can have an impact somewhere else. (cont....)

There's nothing more clear about the action/ impact relationship than climate change. Years of fossil fuel use has led to a very clear rise in global temperature and climate is changing around the world.

Catholic social teaching tells us, we must have solidarity; that we have a responsibility towards one another. Pope Benedict XVI tells us that "The human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side." We are a single global family.

Participation, Daniel reminded us, is vital to a well functioning society. Involving people is important. When you include lots of people in the decision making processes and give them a bit of support, you get better and fairer decisions. So society needs diversity, participation and a sense of individual and community investment. Maybe Big Society isn't quite enough of a description. Daniel felt that he would be more comfortable with something like the Inclusive, Fair, Just and Sustainable Society.

Progressio is all about claiming power, their tag line is People Powered Development. Development by invitation is development of the few by the few but people powered development is people becoming, as Paul VI put it, "artisans of their own destiny" a development of the people, for the people. That's a development that will always strive to be responsive, and will always be best placed to put the poor at its centre.

Maybe, Daniel suggested, there's a paradox at the heart of the Big Society – it'll work, and I mean really work, if we throw ourselves into it. And it won't work at all if we're reticent. If we see it as a political project, with all the limitations that suggests, it's automatically limited.

After all, Jesus didn't say, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and build the Big Society", he told us to love our neighbours as ourselves.

PROGRESSIO
empower

Their presentation was followed by Barbara Kentish from Westminster J&P with the Southwark launch of '100 Days of Peace'.

Inspired by the Sacred Truce, which preceded the ancient Greek Olympics, this is an initiative to involve all schools and parishes in creating a legacy of peace during and after the Olympics.

Suggestions for parishes, churches and communities include holding a sports event with neighbouring churches (reach out to one you don't normally link with). A mini-Olympics.

Walking some of the London Outer Orbital Path or Capital Ring as a parish pilgrimage, or a sponsored walk. Making a link with another place of worship and walk there for a prayer, a meal or a party. Walking the Pax Christi Peace Trail in Central London or creating 'peace trail' in the local area, honouring blue plaques, or places with local heroes.



100 Days of Peace

Leaflets are available on request from our JPIC office and there is much more information at www.peacelegacy.org.uk

At lunchtime we were most pleased to host a book launch. 'Catholic Social Conscience: Reflection and Action on Catholic Social Teaching' sets out, in a collection of essays edited by Francis Davis and Keith Chappell, to explore the possibilities for a renewed Catholic social conscience in these times of change. There are chapters written by academics, by survivors of Soviet persecution and by those at the coalface of charity leadership and community activism.



Richard Zipfel and Keith Chappell reminded us that our mission and our evangelisation has to come through the credibility of our actions. Truth comes from God and this book seeks to engage with that.

The book is available on line from Amazon and probably from more reputable organisations as well. Normal price is £12.95.

Our first speaker after lunch was Francis Davis. Francis is a member of the University of Oxford Centre for Mutual and Employee Owned Enterprises and was, until recently, Senior Policy Advisor to the UK Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

He started by telling us that there are three times as many Catholic Social Action projects as there are our parishes. In a "Women's Own" interview in 1987 Margaret Thatcher said "there is no such thing as Society" but now David Willets, Conservative MP for Havant, tells us that it is in the self interest of people to work together – the Big Society?

In the 1980s Bishop John Jukes, who has sadly died since the Assembly, was in constant communication with the Conservative governments. He served for 20 years as chairman of the bishops' committee for the world of work and, to quote from his obituary: "Was passionate in his belief that Catholic social teaching had a valuable contribution to make to the understanding of work in society".

Of late, Francis said, this focus has been lost and we, the Church, have missed the chance to shape the concept of "Big Society". He emphasised that we should be seeking a new culture of social responsibility and trying to regain the voice which the Church had, when influenced by Bishop Jukes and by Bishop Tripp, in the 1980s.

Greg Clark, from Conservative Central Office, would admit that the Labour governments meant well but would maintain that they got carried away with meeting targets - often targets which were in conflict with one another. Where there were controlled families now we have chaotic families, however he does accept that we need to devolve to local initiatives – subsidiarity.

Influenced by Phillip Blond's "Red Toryism" the Big Society was the flagship policy idea of the Conservatives 2010 election manifesto. The stated aim is "to create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a big society that will take power away from politicians and give it to people".

Now in government though the conflicts are emerging. Ian Duncan-Smith's public sector reforms with Eric Pickles' localisation and decentralisation and Ken Clark's initiatives to tackle social decay. And we have Teresa May's stated view that all societies ills are caused by "gangs and feckless kids".

On the other side there are elements in the Labour opposition, known as Blue Labour, which believes that, in the post-war period following the creation of the National Health Service, Labour

developed a top-down model of government that became "remote, bossy and managerial". Although a wonderful achievement they believe that the welfare state took away the mutual solidarity - the ways we took care of each other - and handed them over to the state."

The problem for the Church is the need to combine faith with reason. There are lessons to be learned from around the world. In the Bronx the Jesuits, concerned about truancy, started a scheme in the Cristo Rey school to give students one day a week doing a real job. Truancy dropped, students could more easily get a reference and now the scheme is being rolled out across the USA.

Closer to home Francis mentioned a school in Kidderminster where the police station was located inside the school together with family support and "Sure Start" next door. This combination improved the service to the community whilst cutting costs. At a simpler level perhaps a parish could get together to provide support for disabled people within their community.

The best way to impact on Government policy, he told us, is to invent a project so astounding that the whole world will copy it. He concluded by quoting a story from Rabbi Hugo Gryn who suggested that, on reaching a Red Sea, Moses was in some confusion about the way to go and it was a young person who tried stepping in the water to see what would happen – so keep taking the first step.

Our final speaker was Alison Gelder, Chief Executive of Housing Justice. Housing Justice is a membership organisation with 90% of its membership from people and organisations outside statutory bodies.



"Big Society" resonates with subsidiarity and Catholic social teachings "Option for the Poor" and the "Common Good" but, Alison told us, subsidiarity cuts both ways as some decisions still do need to be made at the top. (cont.....)

Local churches are involved in many good works, soup runs, temporary shelters and even long term housing projects but there is a danger of the Church being co-opted and work on the ground being claimed by others. The Church on the ground needs to protect the hierarchy from flat-terers, we need to tell them what we think so that they can represent us. At parish level Fr Michael has a voice in the community in Woolwich and can talk about the needs of problem families but this is not the same for all parish priests.

The Localism Bill has nasty changes for homelessness legislation but also some good in allowing more local participation in planning. This will require local communities being equipped to make these decisions. There is a particular need to campaign against the household benefits cap, particularly in London where social costs are much higher.

Homelessness is estimated to have risen by 14% at the same time as the budget to help is being cut, snapshot counts regularly miss a large number of rough sleepers. Of the 26,000 who have applied for temporary accommodation only 12,000 were accepted. Rents are increasing in the private sector and there is a severe lack of social housing and pressure to replace paid workers with volunteers.

In London the GLA recognises the value of faith workers and the Mayor is putting money into eliminating homelessness but does not quite

trust organisations which are “care” rather than “target” driven. Westminster is now working better following the success of the soup run campaign.

Problem areas are that there are wide difference between local authorities, a system of quality standards is urgently needed. Also it needs to be clear where responsibility lies in the event of a disaster – Baby P or a tower block fire as examples. Are LAs structured to take these additional devolved responsibilities?

Blueprint for local action, a guide for clergy to support people in housing difficulties resulting from the housing benefit cap, is available to download from the resources section of the Housing Justice website. It lists simple things that parishes can do from taking on major cases to simply starting a food bank to offer assistance to families struggling to live on a limited disposable income.

Alison told us that where the Church is abdicating its responsibility is in the discrepancy between what should be paid from tax and what from voluntary income. She felt that the Church should defend those in need but she was unsure whether the Church as a whole is clear about its capability to take on social services. No one agency in the Caritas Social Action Network is big enough on its own – we all need to work together to take action ourselves and agitate to get our Church to stand up for the poor.

For the final session of the day our speakers were joined by Bishop Pat for a wide ranging question and answer session.



Space limitations preclude a full report but some of the interesting points made:

On the subject of housing problems Bishop Pat said that the erosion of the welfare state began with the sale of council houses. It was generally agreed that we needed to get the Government and LAs to build more houses and create jobs.

Alison suggested that the Church should have a hard look at its property portfolio to see what could be better used to serve the wider community for housing or other requirements.

The need for wider training in Catholic Social Teaching was mentioned - there is a group working on this and a web site has been set up which has a vast range of materials. www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk

A suggestion was made by Bishop Pat that J&P groups and other parish organisations should be working together, at deanery level, to influence Local Authorities to better serve the disadvantaged in their communities.

Do we need to “plug the gap” or change policy to stop the gap? Is there an ethical policy within government.

A plea was made for more parishes to become involved in the *LiveSimply* parish award scheme.

Southwark JPIC Office, Cathedral House, Westminster Bridge Rd London, SE1 7HY; 020 7928 9742
office@southwarkjandp.co.uk
Chair: Fr Michael Scanlon, Coordinator: Terry Brown
Website: www.southwarkjandp.co.uk