

Archdiocese of Southwark  
Commission for  
*Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*



JPIC Update    New Year 2014



### ***The UK Common Rights Project***

Over the last few years there have been many attacks on the rights of street homeless people. The UK Common Rights Project, which has been set up by Housing Justice and a number of other homelessness charities, is insisting that the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society should have the essential things needed for life – shelter, food, water and sanitation. In our affluent country it is surely fundamentally wrong that any person should be prevented from accessing these basic rights.

The goals of the campaign are to increase public awareness of the needs and the hardships faced by people without homes, to improve the confidence and self esteem among people without homes and to foster better and more hospitable responses to the needs of street homeless people.

A film supporting the project, which has eight people telling something of their life stories and the struggles that have had to find these basic necessities of life, was launched in the House of Parliament in December. The film and more information about the project can be seen at [www.commonrights.org.uk](http://www.commonrights.org.uk)

If you only see one film on-line this year make it this one and if you can arrange a showing in your own parish or community, or would like further information about the project please contact Alastair Murray [a.murray@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:a.murray@housingjustice.org.uk)

### **Commemorating the First World War: appropriate responses for peacemakers. *By Valerie Flessati***

As the BBC adds its saturation programming for the First World War centenary to the commemoration plans announced by the government I'm already feeling war weary.

How can we separate the mixed emotions that WW1 evokes in us - individually and collectively - from appropriate responses by peacemakers today? Since few will choose to stand completely aloof from local or national events I suggest that our overall attitude must be critical awareness.

Awareness first of all of our own seared consciences – appalled by the destruction of life and yet gruesomely fascinated, especially by that war. Who doesn't prefer an exhilarating marching tune – even while realising its siren deceit – to some worthy anti-war lament?

We know about lions led by donkeys, public opinion manipulated into frenzy by propaganda about the Hun, the victimisation of Belgium. This is the war which several generations have come to regard as pitiable, senseless and murderous. Yet we are even now being manipulated again. The government seems bent on a revisionist version and we suspect that this is to whip up support for the armed forces, to recruit amongst unemployed youth, and perpetuate the 'old lie' that war is useful, inevitable and conducted by 'heroes'.

We want to oppose any commemorative 'war fever' but we'll have to be discerning about how we express it. Even at this distance it is distressing to dwell on what happened, and for so many of us it is still a family story. There will be times when silence is the best way to respect that.

Critical discernment also applies to the array of cultural events and educational resources on offer. Some may be transforming. A hundred years disappear when the emotional force of a twenty-five-year-old Wilfred Owen or Vera Britain hits young people at a similarly tender age. Owen's observation that 'pure Christianity will not fit in with pure patriotism' convinced me at 17; it still does.



(cont...)

Exposing the truth will compel us to ask awkward questions, for example, of those planning local events. Why are we only remembering the British dead? Why are we using the pious language of sacrifice and pseudo-Christian ceremonial to disguise the reality of war? We may feel pride in an individual grandfather but, a hundred years later, what does national pride mean? Is it real – or healthy - in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How many of today's conflicts have roots in post-WW1 treaties? What can we learn from this?

At St Paul's Cathedral recently American theologian Stanley Hauer was suggested that we need new terminology to shake people's complacency. Suppose we spoke of the 'First World Slaughter' instead of 'First World War'?

How else can we creatively challenge the accepted narrative? We have fresh and mostly untold stories to tell – about the 1200 women who held a peace conference in The Hague in 1915, making proposals which were largely incorporated in the League of Nations; about the mutinies and industrial strikes... the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and especially about the conscientious objectors. The astonishing furor provoked in the popular press by the award of Heritage Lottery funding to the Peace Pledge Union revealed that division over patriotism and pacifism is as buoyant as ever.

And we can impart our own Catholic peace history, such as Ashley Beck describes in his article about Benedict XV. The tiny Guild of the Pope's Peace, founded in 1916, was an antecedent of British Pax Christi through Francis Meynell, a Catholic CO whose niece was one of the founders of PAX in 1936, and E.I.Watkin, its first president.

So, we approach the First World War anniversary hoping to carry out the most profound wish of that generation, especially of the soldiers, by our work to abolish war itself.

In our 'Penny catechism' contrition went together with a 'firm purpose of amendment' and a resolve, with the help of God, 'to begin a new life for the future'. A future **without** war should be our central objective for this centenary. Anything less will be a four-year indulgence in sentimental remembrance that leads nowhere.

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### **Dates for your new diary (More information on both these events to follow)**

#### ***May 17th - our Spring Assembly***

Being held this year at Holy Innocents school, Mitchell Road, Orpington

#### ***June 28th - centenary of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand***

We are planning to hold a peace walk around some of the many peace sites in London ending in the Peace Garden at the Imperial War Museum and followed by a short meeting in Amigo Hall.

### **January Events**

#### ***January 17<sup>th</sup> – Bethlehem: Checkpoints and Challenges***

An illustrated talk by Jean Harrison. 8pm Upper Room, Virgo Fidelis parish, Upper Norwood, 143 Central Hill, SE19 1RT. All welcome.

#### ***January 19<sup>th</sup> - Peace Sunday - "Living as one family is the foundation and pathway to peace." (Pope Francis - World Peace Day 2014)***

Please do all you can to promote Peace Sunday, Pax Christi relies on this as a major source of support and income - resources available from [www.paxchristi.org.uk](http://www.paxchristi.org.uk)

#### ***January 19th - World Day of Migrants and Refugees***

The theme chosen by Pope Francis to celebrate this event is "Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World". The text of the Holy Father's message can be found on the website [www.pcmigrants.org](http://www.pcmigrants.org)

#### ***January 29th - Housing for the Common Good***

Discussion chaired by Bishop Pat Lynch with input from David Orr (National Housing Federation). 6-8pm in Amigo Hall, St George's Cathedral.

#### ***January 25th to February 2nd 2014 - Poverty and Homelessness Action Week***

Standing with people in crisis - give, act, pray. In this time of economic crisis people experiencing poverty and homelessness are being hit harder than anybody else by the recession and spending cuts. See [www.actionweek.org.uk](http://www.actionweek.org.uk) for resources and for more information.