



ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK

JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION COMMISSION

2014 SPRING ASSEMBLY

Solidarity with the Poor

Speakers: Alison Gelder from Housing Justice

"Why Welfare Reform matters to Christians"

Jackie McLoughlin from National Board of Catholic

Women - "Lobbying your MP"

The Southwark JPIC 2014 Spring Assembly was held at Holy Innocents Primary School, Orpington on Saturday May 17th. Fr Arbogast Lekule, Chair of the Commission, led the opening prayers and welcomed Bishop Howard Tripp who had joined us for the day along with members of Justice & Peace groups, and organisations involved in the day, from across the diocese

We were most pleased that the local Member of Parliament, Jo Johnson (brother of Boris) was able to make a brief visit to welcome us. He gave a short presentation, moving a little away from the day's main emphasis on the welfare needs in this country, in which he emphasised the Government's commitment to maintaining the iconic UN target 0.7% of national income going to overseas aid.

The meeting started with a lively table discussion, which resulted in some interesting feedback, facilitated by Phil Kerton:

The growing need for and increasing provision of food banks was mentioned by several tables. The fact that these are caring and welcoming organisations, generally run by volunteers was emphasised. Clients coming in to expect a government handout are often surprised by the warm welcome they receive and also by the fact that the food available to them has generally come from individual donors. That said one table raised the question as to whether food banks are just papering over the cracks in the welfare state. Perhaps we need to care for the vulnerable whilst we vigorously campaign for their rights.

One parish mentioned that they were no longer operating a parish FairTrade stall as FairTrade goods were available in Supermarkets. Whilst tea, coffee and sugar is now widely available it was suggested that parish stalls could look at stocking handicrafts, textiles and greeting cards. There are also items like biscuits and food bars which are not always available in supermarkets.

One table consisting mainly of people active in J&P parish groups emphasised the need be proactive in reaching out to other parishioners and getting them involved. Areas suggested where the word could be spread included raising awareness of people trafficking, climate change, trade justice and the need for food banks. Contacting prisoners of conscience, particularly with cards at Christmas and looking at help of visiting the elderly and lonely.



A table with mainly people from organisations emphasised that even without established J&P parish groups the work for justice and peace issued continued with support for CAFOD, Pax Christi and Christain Unity as well as raising funds for migrant / refugees support and raising awareness about people trafficking.

Some individual ideas from parishes were mentioned. Petts Wood parish are close to being the first in the diocese to gain the LiveSimply parish award, we hope to have a presentation about this in our Autumn Assembly. Sevenoaks J&P are working with first communion candidates on how they can become more socially involved. One parish group has “prayer members” with the particular need where prayers are sought mentioned in the weekly parish newsletter.

Our first speaker was Alison Gelder, Director of Housing Justice speaking on Why welfare reform matters to Christians. Alison first told us a little about Housing Justice, a national Christian organisation which is a Christian voice on housing and homelessness issues. They aim to raise awareness of the issues and of possible solutions such as helping churches house homeless people, as well as encouraging partnership and speaking up for church action. It is a membership organisation and more information can be found at www.housingjustice.org.uk , phone 020 3544 8094.



Catholics support the welfare state but they are not alone with 59% of the population saying that it is the government’s responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed, 81% agreeing that it should be the government’s responsibility to provide decent housing for those who can’t afford it and 88% wanting taxes & public spending to stay the same (54%) or to be increased (34%).

Historically societies have always had to find ways to ensure that all their members have adequate food, clothing and shelter. This has been done in different ways at different times - within families, by landowners, by employers, by church organisations, by charities and philanthropists, by government or a mixed economy or blend of some or all of these. The market has never provided sufficient adequate & affordable housing for all the citizens in a society – and 21st century England is no different.

Social security as a concept is enshrined in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, *“Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realisation, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organisation and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for their dignity and the free development of their personality”*

So the State in which a person lives should, so far as its resources and those of other countries allow, help them to live and to develop as a rounded human being. And one of the things people need for human flourishing is, as the Housing Justice vision states: a home that truly meets their needs.

The rules of life for the people of God are set out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These state very clearly the responsibilities of the community to provide for widows, orphans and strangers. That is, for all the people for whom there was no other source of provision because they fell outside the normal scope of the family group, outside the bounds of the main provider of ‘welfare’ at the time.

For Christians there is a basic and fundamental connection between welfare and redemption, the golden rule we learn from Christ: ‘love thy neighbour’ and Catholic talk of ‘welfare’ in its most general sense does not start from a place of negativity, nor of naïve paternalism, but instead has positive connotations derived from our orientation towards the common good.

Alison also mentioned Anglican social thought & particularly William Temple. In 1942, when he was Archbishop of York, he wrote a popular Penguin grounded in Anglican social thought which argued in favour of the sort of welfare state Beveridge recommended in his 1942 report to defeat the five giants evils of ‘Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness.

Temple’s book, *Christianity and the Social Order*, set out to provide members of the Church of England with “a systematic statement of principles to aid them in fulfilling their moral responsibilities and functions and exercising their civil rights”. He also drew out the consequences of the principle, still widely, if not universally, held, that the family is the primary social unit of our society. From this flows the imperative that homes should be available for all citizens in which a family can be brought

up in benign conditions, and that pay should be sufficient to cover family holidays and leisure time, as well of course as adequate food, heating, clothing and housing.

From Catholic Social Teaching *The Common Good* (1997) argues that a key test for legislation is to consider its impact on family life and especially on children. It also picks up the human rights aspect of social security: "Individuals have a claim on each other and on society for certain basic minimum conditions without which the value of human life is diminished or even negated". (36)

Throughout there is as much emphasis on the duties we have to each other as on the duties of government. So in paragraph 70: "every individual, no matter how high or low, has a duty to share in promoting the welfare of the community, as well as a right to benefit from that welfare".

Statements about housing and homelessness include the 1985 CBCEW statement which recognises responsibility of Government to ensure effective housing system. Catholic Housing Aid (CHAS) said, "the moral imperative to provide adequate housing is surely second only to that of providing clothing, food & drink". In 1987 and again in 1997 – Pope John Paul II called for Governments to act to address homelessness

Pope Francis' has told us, speaking during a visit to a Jesuit refugee centre in Rome in November 2013: "It is not enough to offer a sandwich if this is not accompanied by the possibility of learning to stand on one's own two feet. Charity that leaves the poor in the same situation as before is not adequate. True mercy, which God gives and teaches us, asks for justice, asks that the poor find the way out of their poverty."

And speaking after praying the angelus on 22nd December 2013. "Family and home go together," said Pope Francis. "I call on everyone: individuals, organs of society, authorities, to do everything possible to assure that every family has a place to live."

From *Evangelii Gaudium* "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully part of society." (187) "It means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter". (188) and "The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies." (203)

Alison also quoted Dr Anna Rowlands "this creeping practice of welfare privation as a form of social control ... seems the most incontrovertibly antithetical to the spirit and letter of CST, and a shift in the fundamental character of European welfare states. (Theos book 40). It does appear that this Government's policy to cut the fiscal deficit is falling on the poorest in our society.

Alison's concluding challenge: The great wisdom of our faith and our tradition is that we are, as individuals and as a society, accountable to God for our actions. We have personal responsibility for living well and for upholding the common good.

The principle of solidarity means that the hurt and distress and deprivation suffered by our brothers and sisters who are having their benefits sanctioned and capped, who find themselves unable to afford housing or sufficient food or adequate clothing, affects us as well.

Somehow we have lost sight of the recognition "that a range of tax-funded services have to be provided for the basic living and social standards of a civilised society" (*Taxation for the Common Good* 2004). This is not a political judgement but a moral one.

Our role as Christians is to shoulder the responsibility placed upon us by living up to the tradition of our church and the practice of our faith.

Looking forward to next year's general election, our role is to articulate the meaning of the common good, and of our common responsibilities, and to ask our politicians how they propose to work with us to deliver a civilised society where all can play their part.

After a lunch break giving those attending the chance to browse the stalls with materials from CAFOD, Progressio, Aid to the Church in Need, Housing Justice and Pax Christi as well as books (and biscuits and cake) brought by the Beech Grove Community from Nonnington and offered free of charge

Our next speaker was Jackie Mcloughlin from National Board of Catholic Women. Jackie spoke on "Lobbying for change" how to contact and influence our parliamentarians. She started with a quiz which proved to us all how ignorant we were about our parliament.

If you wish to exert influence, she told us, the first rule is get involved: Register to vote and vote, know your MP you can find full information at www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/ or the unofficial site www.theyworkforyou.com where you can find read debates they've taken part in, see how they voted and sign up for an email alert whenever they make a contribution. Also go to your MPs local surgery to speak to them face to face. There are various aspects of parliament:

Select Committees: As well as the houses, parliament has a number of select committees these are cross party groups of MPs, all backbenchers, which have considerable power as their chairs are elected by other MPs. They shadow government departments and can hold inquiries, call for written or oral evidence, call ministers in for questioning and publish reports to which the government must respond within 60 days.

All Party Parliamentary Groups: These are interest groups with a broad range of subjects, there is a full list of groups on the parliamentary website.

Every voter can submit a public petition to their MP and request that the MP present this formally in chamber. There is a guide for this , also on the parliament website

Early Day Motions rarely result in debate but are used to raise the profile of an issue, you can ask your MP to post one. You can even write it yourself in one sentence, using conventional wording, and ask your MP to present it.

Recent early day motions include one which congratulated Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, on his elevation to the College of Cardinals and his strong support for social justice. Another sponsored by Austin Mitchell put forward the argument "That this House recognises that the bedroom tax, spare room subsidy, is unjust, discriminates against disabled and sick people, carers, separated parents, grandparents, the low paid and the poorest, will not reduce homelessness or housing benefit spending as claimed, and puts financial and social strain on communities, landlords and local authorities; and calls on the Government to suspend the policy pending a review of its impact and effectiveness, which should consider writing off the tenant and landlord arrears it has caused"

What can we do? We can ask an MP or a peer to ask a question in the chamber or ask written question. Ask an MP to seek an adjournment debate – if successful the relevant Government minister must respond. Submit written evidence to any parliamentary committee looking at a Bill and ask for your views or those of your organisation to be considered in oral evidence. You can suggest changes that you want to see made to Bills by contacting an MP or peer

What can your MP do? They can support and Early Day Motion (you could write it). Enter the ballot for a 10 min rule bill. Enter ballot for adjournment debate. Refer a question to a select committee. Ask a question at Prime Ministers Questions.

Other ways to influence legislation are through your local councilors or MEPs. By seeking media coverage, taking direct action, starting and signing E-petitions or by taking up volunteering opportunities.

As a final point Jackie gave advice on developing a good relationship with your MP. The first point was to build a good relationship with their staff always being polite and courteous. In writing letters try to keep to one side of A4, use your own words, stick to one issue only in a letter and include supporting facts to strengthen your case.



DATE FOR YOUR DIARY
18th October our Autumn Assembly in Amigo Hall, St George's Cathedral.
Topics will include CAFOD's Climate Campaign and the LiveSimply parish award

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