



Archdiocese of Southwark  
Commission for

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation



## Newsletter - Spring 2013

### **Enough Food for Everyone IF Campaign: Please write to your MP ahead of the Budget!**

The 2013 Budget presents an historic opportunity for the UK to be the first Government ever to deliver on its promise to spend 0.7% of national income on aid; and also to stop big companies dodging tax in poor countries. Ahead of the Budget on 20 March, we're calling on you to ask your MP to put pressure on Chancellor George Osborne to:

- confirm that from 2013 onwards, 0.7% of national income will go to life-saving aid, stopping children dying from hunger and helping the poorest feed themselves. It's about time to live up to a 40 plus-year old promise, which could inspire other rich nations to act.
- confirm that the aid budget will be spent supporting those throughout the world in need and not supporting the defence budget
- announce that the Finance Bill will make UK companies operating in poor countries spill the beans on tax dodging.

You can take action on the CAFOD Campaigns page at [www.cafod.org.uk/IFBudget](http://www.cafod.org.uk/IFBudget)

### **But will the 0.7% really go to those in need?**

The news that the Prime Minister David Cameron has decided to divert money from the aid budget to buy weapons and fund military training is causing great concern to charities working overseas.

CAFOD have spoken out against this stating that they believe the fundamental principle behind any spend of the aid budget is that it is focused on how best to reduce poverty for the poorest and most disadvantaged. The money committed to aid must not be viewed by politicians as something that can be switched to serve other political purposes.

"The aid budget must be directed towards activities which have made, and will continue to make, a huge difference to the lives of the poorest and most disadvantaged. ....any approach to supporting stability and security using aid money must be driven by development and poverty reduction not by national interests or politics and must abide by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence."

### **What does your MP do? [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) can give you the answers.**

You can sign up to receive e-mails whenever your MP speaks in parliament and also e-mail him or her from the site, read debates and written answers, see what's coming up in Parliament and sign up for email alerts when there's past or future activity on someone or something you're interested in. One good piece of advice that I was given was to remember to compliment your MP when they say something you agree with as well as telling them when you feel they are in the wrong. Better not to be identified as "a troublemaker" and have your e-mails automatically deleted without being read.

### **A way to raise awareness of human trafficking**

During the Olympics I was pleased to be able to help raise awareness of human trafficking and how to take action to help end it at a couple of the GIFT boxes organised by Stop The Traffik and United Nations at various London venues. On the outside the boxes show the promises made but the stories on the inside tell the realities of what people who take up these offers find. The boxes were packed away after the games but as the sun comes out with the approach of spring the GIFT boxes are also coming out of hibernation and travelling to events across the UK. The GIFT boxes are available and free for you to use, you only need to arrange transport for the box to your venue.

Hosting a box in your community can be a great addition to an event, or a reason to create one! For more information e-mail [info@stopthetraffik.org](mailto:info@stopthetraffik.org) or phone 020 7921 4258.



## **Welfare Benefit Changes.**

As you will no doubt be aware, from April 2013, significant changes will be taking place in the UK as part of the Government's welfare reforms. This briefing aims to:

- provide a summary of the main changes that are taking place and some of the concerns being raised regarding the impact of the changes
- Highlight the effect these changes may have on local parishes.
- offer ideas of how individual Catholics, and parish communities may respond to the changes
- reflect through catholic social teaching on a faith response to the welfare changes and their effects

From April this year significant changes will take place in the UK welfare benefit system. These will affect working age people receiving benefits &/or tax credits, as well as people with disabilities aged between 16 and 64, those currently receiving Disability Living Allowance.

The Government is implementing these changes because it "Has identified two key problems with the current system: work incentives are poor, and the system is too complex" The reforms aim to help people move into and progress in work, while supporting the most vulnerable but there are concerns that the changes will, and are already having disastrous consequences for individuals and families.

## **The Main changes**

Universal Credit (UC) will be introduced from April 2013. It will apply to people aged between 16 and 64. This credit will merge six existing benefits: jobseekers allowance, income related employment and support allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits, and Housing Benefits.

- Universal Credit will be distributed at household level, rather than to individuals. It will be paid as a monthly single payment, and administered online.
- Under occupancy. People living in rented property, who receive benefits, and are deemed to have one or more "spare bedrooms", will have their benefit reduced. This will be 14% for one extra bedroom, and 25% for two extra bedrooms. This has been named the "Bedroom Tax".
- For single people under 35, with no dependents who rent from a private landlord the housing benefit component will only allow for the shared accommodation rate. This means that they will only be entitled to enough local housing allowance to cover the average cost of a single room in a shared house in their area. They will receive local housing allowance at this rate even if they rent alone.
- Benefits will be capped, to ensure no one on benefits receives more than can be earned on an average wage. Couples and one parent families cannot receive more than £500 per week; a single person cannot receive more than £300 per week.
- Disability Living Allowance will be replaced by Personal Independence Payment from 2013.
- Council Tax Benefit will be abolished and replaced by a system of localised support.

## **Concerns raised by the changes**

- A lot of press coverage and government briefings about the welfare changes have resulted in stigmatisation of the poor and those receiving benefits, with references to "skivers" and "scroungers". Not only is this inaccurate (60% of welfare benefits are pension related. Of the rest, the majority are paid to people in low paid work, and only 0.7% of benefits are claimed fraudulently) but it is unjust, and discriminates against those already struggling.
- The move to payment at household level rather than individuals has "been criticised for its potential to create an unfair bias against women...Incorporating payments for children into UC means that child-related support will not necessarily be paid to the main carer. This has given rise to concerns that the support may be less likely to reach the children it is meant to help."
- A shift to monthly payments will be a significant change for low income families used to budgeting on a weekly basis. There is concern that during the changes many people may end up borrowing money from money shops etc. to cover the shortfall, beginning their new claims already in debt.
- The Bedroom tax will have a particular impact on those in a property deemed too large, through no fault of their own, or because they require it due to family circumstances e.g.
- if a single parent whose child/ren live with their other parent, no allowance will be made for a spare room for a child to stay;
- people with disabilities needing a room for carers to stay overnight;



- people who through ill health have to sleep apart from their partner;
- couples housed by councils in 2 bedroom properties
- Deductions are made from UC if one or more adults live in the house that are not part of the household – this includes family members who are 16 or over. They are assumed to make a contribution towards rent.
- Families housed with a room each for their children (same sex children under 16 count as sharing; children under 10 regardless of sex count as sharing)
- Housing benefit will be included in the Universal Credit payment, with very limited opportunity for the tenant to choose to have it paid direct to the landlord. With rent money coming to the claimant, there may be a tendency to use it for other items, and rent arrears may build up.
- Benefits are assumed to be administered online, regardless of a person's access to a computer. There will be limited face to face access, an issue that could cause particular issues for the elderly and those on low incomes.

### ***What does this have to do with parishes?***

- It will have a significant impact for many individuals and families reliant on benefits, including many in the communities in which our parishes sit, while they adjust to the changes.
- It is likely that there will be an impact on some parishioners currently receiving benefits.
- It is likely that there will be increased requests for financial and other practical help from parishes and church organisations.
- It is predicted that there will be an increase in homelessness, particularly younger homeless.
- As Catholic Christians we have a responsibility to help those in need and challenge injustice. Catholic Social Teaching urges us to act for the Common Good, to make the Dignity of the Human Person central to all our actions and considerations, and to be in solidarity with those who are struggling.

Whatever our individual feelings about changes to welfare policy, if it has a detrimental impact on the lives of individuals and families (even in the short term) we have a responsibility as Catholics to offer help and support.

### ***Ideas for parish and individual responses***

- Pray for those who are struggling, those becoming homeless, in increasing debt, experiencing stress and anxiety from the changes.
- Raise awareness with groups in the parish and other ministries involved in responding to need including SVP & Justice & Peace groups.
- Support organisations working with the homeless e.g.
- Housing Justice <http://www.housingjustice.org.uk>, the Manna Centre <http://www.mannasociety.org.uk>, Depaul UK <http://www.depauluk.org> or The Passage <http://www.passage.org.uk>
- Support local food banks – this is not a long term solution, but in the short term needs support.
- Work with other churches and community organisations to support individuals/ families struggling with changes and adapting to the changing circumstances including help with budgeting, debt management etc.
- Gather a list of local organisations/ numbers that can help, especially with short term financial assistance e.g. Citizens Advice <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>,
- Offer emotional support to many of those fearing the changes.
- Gather evidence of how the cuts are affecting people, and present them to your local council/ MP.
- Find out about local credit unions and encourage people to join them.  
Credit Unions <http://www.abcul.org/home>
- Share ideas with other parishes and the wider archdiocese.

Although parts of this article are relevant to people with disabilities it deals specifically with changes to working age benefits. Further information on specific changes to disability benefits is available the Campaign for a Fair Society website <http://www.campaignforafairsociety.com/>

Thanks are due to Miriam McHardy, Co-ordinator for Justice & Peace for the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh on whose "Guide to Parishes" this article is largely based.



# OUR SPRING ASSEMBLY - Saturday May 11th

## "Blessed are the Poor? - Social Justice in The Year of Faith"

10 for 10.30 to 4pm at The Franciscan International Study Centre  
Giles Lane, Canterbury CT2 7NA.

Our keynote speaker on "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation:  
The Insights of Franciscan Theology and Spirituality"  
will be Séamus Mulholland OFM who teaches Franciscan Studies at the Centre.  
Other speakers include Joanna Waller, a writer and long tern SVP member  
and Clive Lambie from the Croydon Credit Union.

The Study Centre can be reached by bus from Canterbury East and Canterbury West Stations  
and has plenty of free parking. For anyone wishing to make a weekend of it we have information  
available from the office about local B&B accommodation.

All Welcome                      No charge to attend                      Light lunch provided for a small donation.

## Practical Engagement in Justice & Peace

*A day of training and workshops to  
help you make it happen.*

Saturday 22nd June 10.30 to 4.00 (tea & coffee from 10am)  
at Cathedral Halls, Brentwood

**Workshops on: Catholic Social Teaching, Human trafficking,  
How the scripture relates to work in the community  
and Lobbying your MP. Choose 2 from 4.**

*All are welcome. Tea and coffee provided - bring lunch  
No charge to attend but donations welcome.*

*To book a place e-mail [office@southwarkjandp.co.uk](mailto:office@southwarkjandp.co.uk) or phone 0207 928 9742 and leave a message*

### **March 23<sup>rd</sup> - Romero: Prophet of Peace for Our Times**

The annual ecumenical service marking the 33rd anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero. 11am at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ.

Preacher: Marie Dennis, Co-President of Pax Christi International.

Contact: [romerotrust@btinternet.com](mailto:romerotrust@btinternet.com) website: [www.romerotrust.org.uk](http://www.romerotrust.org.uk)

### **March 23<sup>rd</sup> - WWF Earth Hour**

At 8.30pm hundreds of millions will turn off their lights for one hour, on the same night, all across the world in a huge, symbolic show of support for the future wellbeing of our planet. Go to [www.earthhour.org](http://www.earthhour.org) for more information and to sign up.

**Save the date! On Saturday 8 June**, The IF Coalition faith groups and charities are joining together in a big, family-friendly event with a serious Food message ahead of the G8. More details to follow soon.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list, receive the newsletter by email, get notice of actions or forthcoming events via email, or are able to send a donation, please use the form below:

Name:..... I would like to receive future newsletters by:

Address:..... Post:  E-mail:  Both:

.....Postcode: ..... Please put me the e-mail list to receive regular updates on Justice & Peace issues:

Email:.....

I enclose a donation of £                      towards costs                      (PAYABLE TO SOUTHWARK JUSTICE & PEACE OFFICE)

Please send to: The Coordinator, Southwark J & P Office, Cathedral House, Westminster Bridge Rd, London, SE1 7HY  
Phone/Fax: 020 7928 9742                      Email: [office@southwarkjandp.co.uk](mailto:office@southwarkjandp.co.uk)