



Archdiocese of Southwark
Commission for

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Newsletter - Winter 2013



“To oppress the poor insults the Creator” (Proverbs 14:31)

Church Action on Poverty calculates that over 20% of people in the UK live in poverty and, whilst there are signs of some level of economic recovery the gap between rich and poor is greater than at any time in the last 40 years.

In a joint statement, issued after their recent plenary meeting, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales have warned that poverty is threatening the fabric of society and that some families are enduring so much hardship that they are effectively destitute. They said that “Widening economic inequality corrodes the common good” The bishops urged that steps should be taken to “curb unjustifiably high pay” and to promote the living wage.

The Living Wage is an hourly wage rate calculate to take into consideration the costs of housing, transport, food and basic essentials for the worker and their family. At present it is £8.80ph inside London and £7.65ph outside London compared with the legal minimum wage of £6.31ph. In November 2012 the Catholic Bishops’ Conference passed a resolution which fully endorsed the principle of the Living Wage and encouraged Catholic organisations and charities in England and Wales to work towards its implementation.

A Living Wage Employer ensures that all employees are paid at least the Living Wage. This includes individuals who work on a regular basis at their premises for a subcontractor, such as cleaners or security staff. Living Wage employers report improved morale, lower turnover of staff, reduced absenteeism, increased productivity and improved customer service. There is a video to watch and a booklet which can be downloaded. Go to www.cbcew.org.uk and search for “living wage”

The bishops’ statement comes at a time when people are experiencing pressure on their finances as they struggle with the cost of living, particularly their rising fuel bills and their pre-Christmas spending, while average wages are either frozen or have increases well below the rate of inflation. Those on benefits have been hard hit too, with housing benefit being cut for those with spare rooms and benefits overall being capped, regardless of a family’s size.

Under the new rules that came into effect on 1st April, council and housing association tenants of working age lose housing benefit if they have one or more spare bedrooms. The Government said it was ending the “spare-room subsidy” but the change has become better known as the “bedroom tax”.

Another of the changes taking place in the benefit system is the shift from weekly to monthly payments. This will mean a significant change for families or individuals used to weekly budgeting, making those people (as well as the unemployed) vulnerable to debt and the temptations of seeking short-term loans.

Legal loan sharks have created a great deal of misery by lending money irresponsibly to the most vulnerable in our society. In a significant climb down, the government has now agreed to change the law to give the new Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) powers to set a cap on exorbitant interest rates charged on “payday loans” but the figure has not yet been set.

Capping the cost of credit and the number of times the loan can be rolled over is a major market intervention. It could bring huge benefits for consumers, as a recent study in Japan has indicated, but experience in Germany and France has shown there can be equally momentous unintended consequences including reduced access to credit for the poorest and most vulnerable consumers, even driving them to illegal loan sharks.

Our booklet “How benefit changes may affect people in your community” has been widely distributed and only a few copies of the second print run remain. As long as supplies last these will be available on request from the office but copies can easily be downloaded from the front page of our web site www.southwarkjandp.co.uk

A visit to South Sudan.

Before I left for South Sudan, as part of the first Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) team to visit the new country, I read in The Tablet that the Catholic Bishops in South Sudan have said that there is discernable progress in their country, two years after independence. "Most of our people are living in peace and democracy for the first time in their lives" they said. However "corruption and nepotism are a great cause of worry, while inter-communal tensions continue".

When we met the Archbishop of Juba he was rather more positive suggesting that there had been some appointments on independence which were probably based on what people had done rather than what they could do for the future of the new country but now they were getting the right people in the right places and, while corruption was still a problem as it is in many countries, it was now accepted as an issue to be addressed rather than the previous denial that it existed. In terms of getting the right people in the right places we were certainly most impressed by the two local ministers and one (lady) senior civil servant that we met.

Through the international twinning scheme the SVP in England & Wales have supported the work of the Society in Sudan for many years. The parish groups (conferences) in and around Juba have been twinned by conferences here in mutual prayer and with regular quarterly financial support, the third element of twinning, the correspondence, has been difficult but we have now made a good start on addressing this. Currently there are 24 conferences and over 400 members working in their own communities meeting the needs of those in most need to the best of their abilities.

As well as the local conferences the work in and around Khartoum has developed over the years to include homes for street children, feeding centres for pre-school children, medical clinic and vocational training. Some of this work has been funded by an annual Sudan Appeal made by the SVP here but other funders such as the Swiss Association of the Friends of Sister Emmanuel and some Caritas branches have also been most supportive. One of the great pleasures of the visit was meeting some of the former street children who had now come south to work, the first was one we met had a senior position in immigration at the airport and smoothed our way into the country, another was now working in a government ministry but had set up a home for orphans and street children in Juba and was contributing a significant portion of his salary towards the running expenses.



Following independence a senior manager, who had set up one of the homes in Khartoum and moved on to be senior project manager, was asked to come to South Sudan from Australia, where he was then living, and set up a major project in Juba. The Church donated a large piece of land and the Lulugu Centre was established. This is a most impressive project giving formal training in construction, electrical and motor engineering, computing, carpentry and tailoring as well as classes in health awareness and first aid. What was particularly noticeable was that there were girls in all the classes, even construction and motor engineering. With the batch now completing their exams over 1500 will have graduated and a high proportion have achieved financial independence. A conference meeting room has

just been opened together with a shop selling the tailoring products, which looked to be of very good quality. Future plans include growing herbal medicine and a hostel for students with guest accommodation.

Our longest trip was down to the Uganda border to visit a "Green" project. This is producing seedlings for timber and fruit trees which are given, together with some training, to local communities to enable them to establish sources of income. The project here employs 8 women, 4 of them war widows. One striking thing was to see all the full trucks coming in from Uganda, even petrol tankers as although South Sudan has oil it

has, as yet, no refinery. Those going out were generally empty. On the way back we visited the 14 acre SVP farm which was growing teak, mahogany, mango and orange trees with coffee, cassava and beans between the growing saplings. This was also providing employment as well as some potential income.

Whilst there we were most pleased to be able to meet Elisha, one of the members of CAFOD's team there. CAFOD has been working in South Sudan for over 35 years and have had an office in Juba since 2006. CAFOD's programme focuses on Upper Nile, Central Equatorial and Western Equatorial states, working jointly with Caritas Internationalis on humanitarian programmes. This particularly involves working to help the influx of returnees supporting the tens of thousands of new arrivals with food, shelter and basic household utensils for cooking. CAFOD's 2011-12 budget for its South Sudan Programme was approximately £4.5 million and we hope that by introducing SVP to CAFOD the two organisations may both benefit in their work to aid all in such great need in the country.

Another wonderful organisation we met was *Solidarity with South Sudan*. This initiative originated with a request from the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference (SCBC) to assist them in addressing critical educational, health and pastoral needs in South Sudan.

The project addresses these vital needs by creatively merging the talents, abilities, energies and charisms of over 200 religious congregations to work collaboratively on this innovative project. The synergy created by this blending of female and male religious presents a unique opportunity to collaborate harmoniously in the best interests of the people we serve in South Sudan. We were fortunate to be there as they were gathering for their annual meeting and met with this most inspiring group for an informal chat over supper. More can be learned about Solidarity with South Sudan at their website www.solidarityssudan.org.

The work being done by all these Church based organisations is truly making a great difference to the people of this new country. On a first visit it is impossible to judge progress but Elisha from CAFOD, who had been 3 years in Darfur before coming back to Juba, was able to tell us of the great progress that has been made since independence. South Sudan is, thankfully, not making news headlines but all the organisations we met do need our support to keep on with their work to help the people grow and develop their new country and South Sudan certainly still needs our prayers.



A newly planted mango tree

The UK Gold

Of course in this country we do not experience levels of corruption which affect many others but A letter has been sent to Lord Bew, Chair of the Commons Committee on Standards in Public Life from a wide ranging group of individuals and organisation including NJPN following the nationwide showing of the film "The UK Gold". The film clearly shows the extraordinary influence, public and hidden, financial and political, of the City of London on our legislature. Its end produce, not least the formation of new UK tax havens, do so much damage to those most in need in the UK and in the global South.

The letter calls for an open public enquiry to reflect on the relationship between the City, its colossal lobbying activities and the workings of our parliament.

Copies of the film, which has been nominated for the "FACT Journalism Prize" at the Copenhagen International Film Festival, are available from Chris Erskine: chriserskine@gmail.com.

Teach Peace is a new primary school resource from the Peace Education Network. It consists of a set of eight assemblies, follow up activities, resources, prayers and reflections designed to ensure that peace is a key theme in our children's education and will help celebrate peace and peacemakers. To download go to <http://peace-education.org.uk/teach-peace>

Could you be our friend? We now have a Facebook page "Southwark Justice and Peace" which we hope to use to spread round information more quickly than through newsletters. If you use Facebook please get your friends and their friends to "like us"

December 16th – Housing Justice Annual General Meeting

5pm to 8pm at Mount Street Jesuit Centre. London W1. There will be seasonal refreshments followed by Advent reflection and some music. Housing Justice hope as many as possible will join them to find out how they are doing in their 10th anniversary year! Register at: info@housingjustice.org.uk

December 21st - Kent Refugee Help Winter Gathering

KRH invites you to celebrate the Winter Solstice in friendship and solidarity for refugee rights. 3-7pm at 6 Church Street, Wye, TN25 5BJ. Nearest station: Wye. Trains via Folkestone and Canterbury West or from London Charing Cross. Please RSVP to: Sue Powell (for numbers for catering): sue.powell1@virgin.net
Kate Adams (for refugee and migrant travel): kadams314@hotmail.com or call: 07703 788773

January 17th – 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 19th - Peace Sunday - "Living as one family is the foundation and pathway to peace." (Pope Francis - World Peace Day 2014)

The Holy Father has many times stressed the need to combat the throwaway culture and instead has promoted a culture of encounter in order to build a more just and peaceful world. 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

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 of the Pontifical Council 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. Throughout the scriptures, we see that God is always on the side of people who are poor, oppressed, homeless or marginalised. In this time of economic crisis people experiencing poverty and homelessness are being hit harder than anybody else by the recession and spending cuts. Churches are called to show God's bias by standing alongside these people. See www.actionweek.org.uk for resources and for more information.

February 24th - March 9th - Fairtrade Fortnight.

Fairtrade Fortnight 2014 will mark the launch of an exciting new stage of the Make Food Fair campaign that aims to transform the banana industry and ensure those at the sharp end of the supply chain, the millions of struggling banana farmers and workers, get a fair deal.

Vinnie Packs: As temperatures plummet the St Vincent de Paul Society, (SVP) has bought enough stock to provide 10,000 Vinnie Packs for distribution to people living on the streets. Each pack contains cold weather essentials including a hat, gloves and socks which are all thermal, an emergency foil blanket, full sized tube of toothpaste, toothbrush, pen and an information card giving details of where people can go for more advice and support. In London alone, 120 homeless people died in the past year. Their names were read out at a moving service at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square on 7 November.

In order to ensure that the scheme keeps going the SVP are asking the public to sponsor Vinnie Packs at a suggested amount of £3 per pack. Cheques made out to "SVP" can be sent to Vinnie Packs, PO Box 72264, London SW1P 9EZ. The St Vincent de Paul, and more importantly the recipients of the Vinnie Packs, are very grateful for the support they receive. To enquire about packs and for more information please e-mail: VinniePacks@hotmail.com