



Archdiocese of Southwark
Commission for

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Newsletter - Winter 2011



THIRSTY FOR CHANGE?

We take water for granted. Being able to turn on a tap and get a glass of clean, fresh water is a fact for us – like having clothes on our backs or a bed to sleep in. Using a toilet is as commonplace as having a pen to write with.

Yet one in eight of the world's population live without these luxuries – they still can't access clean water. And over a third don't have safe sanitation – toilets and sewage systems that hygienically flush away our waste.

The effects ripple out: hospitals in the poorest countries are overwhelmed from treating illnesses like cholera and dysentery, and children are forced to miss millions of school days each year. The burden of collecting and carrying water falls primarily on women, who can spend up to eight hours every day carrying 40kg of water on their heads or back – that's the equivalent of 40 bags of sugar.

Our faith calls us to act. As Christians, we can't stand by and watch while others suffer. In May 2012, the world's richest nations will meet at the G8 summit. We want David Cameron to ensure they take real steps to turn the tide on water poverty – providing the finance, expertise and political pressure to end the world water crisis.

So please look out for the CAFOD "Thirst for Change" campaign. Coming your way shortly.



Statement from the Executive Committee of National Justice and Peace Network

"The National Justice and Peace Network supports Occupy London in their resistance to economic injustice by active non-violence. We share their call for structural change "towards an authentic global equality" and likewise believe, with them, that the world's resources "must go towards caring for people and the planet, not the military, corporate profits or the rich."

We stand in solidarity with the poor, the weak and the dispossessed, and we wholeheartedly endorse the need for a new, alternative economic and financial system. This is consistent with Catholic Social Teaching. Indeed, the recent papal encyclical Caritas in Veritate states that, "The Catholic Church's social doctrine has always maintained that justice must be applied to every phase of economic activity, because this is

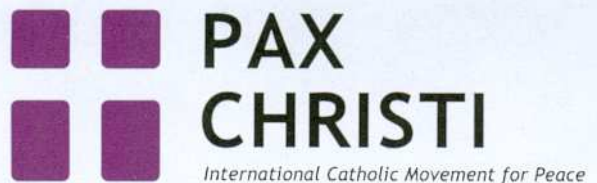
always concerned with people and their needs. Thus every economic decision has a moral consequence."

We all of us need to reflect on society's slavery to Mammon and examine our consciences about the part we play in it. As a grassroots body within the Catholic Church, the National Justice and Peace Network draws its membership from every Diocese in England and Wales, from campaigning organisations and religious orders and, most importantly, from a growing number of individual members. Our values are deeply rooted in the Gospels, and articulated in the Catholic Social Teaching tradition and documents. We work with groups and individuals of all faiths and none in England and Wales on issues of justice and peace."



Sunday 15th January - Peace Sunday
The theme for 45th World Day of Peace message by Pope Benedict XVI is:
"Educating Young People in Justice & Peace"

Resource materials will be available from Pax Christi or from the office.

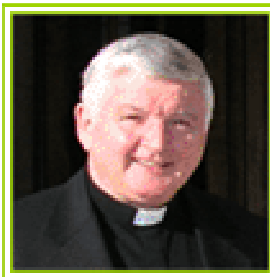


2012 DATES

10th March - Justice & Peace Training Day in Amigo Hall

**19th May - Our Spring Assembly
New Barn, Aylesford Priory**

**Occupy St. Paul's Cathedral:
On which side would Jesus
stand? By Fr Michael Scanlon.**



The deadline for 'Occupy London' to vacate the area outside St. Paul's Cathedral came and passed without any major incident, except for a 'minute silence', hands up. The protest, designed along the lines of 'Occupy Wall Street' in New York, set up camp on 15th October 2011.

As promised, the City of London Corporation applied to the High Court for redress and the hearing is due to commence on December 19th. Whatever the outcome and indeed whatever the different views, St. Paul's Cathedral has once again registered itself as a symbol of Jesus in the heart of the City. What better location than being 'a good neighbor' to London's Stock Exchange (London's pride) - a symbol of what others might call the 'ugly face' of financial capitalism. And this was, ironically, the original target of the protesters.

While public debate continued on the merits of what the organizers called 'real democracy' (arguing that they represent 99% of the population), demonstrations against social injustice, economic inequality and corporate greed continued and the Church found itself in the middle with the resultant question 'on which side would Jesus be'?

In making their case in Court the City of London Corporation has, as part of their public relations, argued that not only were they acting in public interest but that their action is a necessary response to 'pressing social need to protect the rights and freedoms of others...'. So clearly Jesus still remains in the middle. They were at pains to press the fact that they are not acting in support of banks or necessarily against peaceful protest.

This was an important rejoinder because they must have known that 'Occupy London Stock Exchange Protest' made itself in the image of 'Occupy Wall Street' in New York, who impressively say that they were inspired by civil protests in Tunisia and Egypt. How things change!

But whereas the 'parent' protests in those countries, which later became the Arab Spring, bringing in Libya, then Yemen, Syria, Saudi Arabia and others, were about those very basic rights that we take for granted in this country, namely the right to belong to political parties and organizations of our choice and to vote, in London, Jesus' critique would be deeper.

Only this week, the official youth unemployment figure is at an unprecedented level and unacceptably high at 1.03 million or 21.1%. That is the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training. This news came just days after it was announced that disparity in pay has also reached historic levels. To a homeless, unemployed young person, a single mother or a husband struggling on minimum

wage there is nothing that can easily explain to them that a banking executive is paid over £4 million.

At a time when public workers, some of whom have never gone on strike, are likely to do so because of disputes over pension, at a time when reports are awash in the media about the conditions under which some pensioners are treated in their homes by care workers who are stressed and rushed for time, it would not be difficult for Jesus to take sides.

It is easy to label those who take a particular position as 'envious'. Envy is one of the most common sins and perhaps amongst the most difficult to contain but Jesus made it easy for us. Tested by the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Mark 12: 13-17), he leaves us in no doubt that we should "Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and God what belongs to God".

Simple as it might appear, giving to Caesar in our daily lives can be hard. Not surprisingly, it is even harder giving ourselves to God. When the stand-off between protesters, police and the Authorities in the City of London began it was easy to quickly take sides, moralize and where convenient, hang on the fence and blame everyone else but ourselves.

When I last wrote on these columns, I talked about the 'Me' society but perhaps I might add that the bigger danger is the society of 'Me, Myself and I'. Or is it Me, Me, Me?

A Catholic Parishioner recently told me that although they had lived in London for over 20 years, they visited St. Paul's Cathedral for the first time a few weeks ago following these protests. They were curious about media reports and so they wanted to reconcile and put the debate in context by seeing for themselves. The visit reinforced their opinion but also gave them an opportunity to enter the Cathedral for a brief and quiet moment with Christ. As a reasonably qualified adult with vast experience in employment and yet currently out of work, what about the young people just coming out of colleges and universities and worse, those leaving education without qualifications, they asked themselves? It must be hard and puzzling.

The point here is that while the government struggles with seeking a solution to the unprecedented level of unemployment amidst austerity, the ongoing global economic crisis, banking crisis and economic stagnation, perhaps it is time that we all took responsibility and asked ourselves: What role did we play? Was it erroneous government policies, past and present? Was it banks in lending, bonuses, speculations and irrational investments? Was it excess consumerism amongst us, borrowing above our means?

Whereas it would be hard to see Jesus easily on the side of that 'fat cat' banker who speculates, loses billions of peoples money, is bailed out and then gets bonuses 500 times an average wage of his staff, it would be interesting to ask myself, if I am confident that at St. Paul's Cathedral, Jesus would be on my side.

Identifying with the homeless?

By Bandi Mbubi Director of the Manna Centre.

As we celebrate Christmas, many of us only remember the joy of Christmas, not its sadness. As much as Christmas is a joyful occasion, it is also tainted with sadness. The Son of God being born in a stable and Mary and Joseph having to flee, soon after his birth, to protect Baby Jesus from being killed by King Herod. It is a vivid reminder of how much Jesus identifies with people affected by poverty. Having been born homeless, and having experienced exile in Egypt, a foreign land, we can turn to him, knowing that he too went through life's issues and came out of triumphant. But it also places on us a duty to care for all those who are impaired by life problems. As the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, reminded us last year, when visiting a homeless shelter in Rome, it is in feeding the hungry and in welcoming the stranger that we honour Jesus.

Back in 1982, Nannette Ffrench responded to this call by setting up a day centre for homeless people near London Bridge. She would often quote Psalm 95:7, "O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts". The Archdiocese of Southwark has long showed compassion to homeless people and all those in need by generously providing the premises in which we have been operating in since.

The Manna Day Centre caters for about 200 people per day, from 8.30 to 1.30 pm. It is a gateway to a holistic range of support services under a single roof which include breakfast and lunch, shower facilities, clothing, furniture, housing and welfare advice, adult education and training, medical care and furniture. They are offered 7 days a week by a paid staff of 14 and 50 volunteers. It cost over £420,000 PA to run. Approximately 50% of our funding comes from churches, Christian groups and private donations

My experience of working with homeless people has taught me that any one of us can become homeless. As much as we should accept personal responsibility for our predicament, there are often life circumstances that determine it. "There but for the grace of God, go I". We have seen this with some people who have lost their job; meaning the beginning of a downward spiral of debt, discouragement, despair and mental breakdown. I have recently met someone who held a senior management post in the city who had gone through such an experience. He had a mental breakdown after years of bullying from other colleagues. He lost his self esteem, his self respect, his dignity. After a successful career he felt a failure. He did not turn to his family, he felt ashamed. He said to me, "we were never a family to begin with, any way". He did not return their phone calls until they stopped calling him.

Mental or physical health problems can cause some

people to become homeless. I was once pulled aside by someone who shared with me her experience of becoming homeless. She had a mental disturbance which has led her to abandon her practice as a medical doctor. In her case, she was able to turn to her family and they offered her the support she needed. Another time, a weeping mother told me of her anguish of having her son leaving home and adopting a life of homelessness. She tried everything she could to get her son accommodated, but nothing seemed to work. She could not comprehend her son's psychological problems and his rejection of her help.

We have also found that physical and sexual abuse can often trigger all sorts of mental health problems which lead people to develop low self esteem and feel unable to cope with life challenges. There is nothing worse than being abused by those you hold dear, those you love and trust. But this is unfortunately the experience of some people who sleep rough

After serving in the military, some struggle to cope with life as a civilian. They become institutionalised. Years of drilling, the containment of military life, the routines of the army condition them in a way to make them vulnerable outside this structured lifestyle.

Some mental and physical disabilities can be very debilitating, I have seen this through my own two beautiful sisters who have severe learning difficulties, which mean that they always have to rely on other people to survive. Unfortunately, many people who have learning difficulties are not properly diagnosed and given the assistance they need. Some of the difficulties that such a situation can cause are that they become so disruptive that they are labeled anti-social when they could have turned out different.

For us, at the Manna Centre, no one is dispensable. We are committed to the creation of a just society that respects the dignity of every individual, offering unconditional acceptance, trying not to judge but to love. and responding to their need.

Sadly, this year we are facing a shortfall of £50,000. This may just be a sign of the struggling economy, as people have less disposable income. It could also be that more high profile charities are going for the same pot of money as smaller charities like us. The problem is that those who come to us are some of the most needy of our society, those sleeping rough or in inadequate housing, and they would not have anyone else to turn to if we are not around. People who would like to help can do so by sending one off or regular donations to: 6 Melior Street London SE1 3QP

For more information contact Bandi Mbubi, at bandi@mannasociety.org.uk Tel 020 7403 0441 Or check our Website: www.mannasociety.org.uk



Experience of a St Beuno's Retreat. By Julie Cox

St Beuno's is a Jesuit run centre of Ignatian Spirituality, situated in beautiful countryside on the Offa's Dyke, near St Asaph in rural Conwy, North Wales. Mary Colwell led our six-day retreat on the theme 'Nature, God and Us'



Our group consisted of twelve members, many of whom had attended retreats here before. The morning session began with a beautiful chant which helped to still and focus the mind. This led into feedback based on our reflections stemming from the material and questions posed during the previous day. Mary would then deliver her presentation in a gentle but thought-provoking manner with the aid of superb photos, film and quotations. The remainder of the day was spent in silence.

There was usually enough time before lunch to stroll around the gardens or to visit one of several chapels, the 'Capel Coed' offering continuous Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It was also a good time to browse the many publications and Traidcraft items on sale. Meals were of a very high standard and background classical music assisted those not used to silence in company.

The accommodation was very spacious and comfortable. Everywhere was spotless, peaceful and, most importantly, conducive to prayer. Religious art, poetry, sculpture, floral displays, candles and the imposing structure of the historical building itself all added to the ambience of the place.

The theme greatly interested me as I wished to understand more clearly the Catholic perspective surrounding issues of environmental concern. Mary worked through several stages during the five days including the awe and beauty of creation; acknowledgement of the complexity and diversity in creation; our relationship with the Earth; achieving a vision of unity and restored integrity. By the end of the retreat I for one felt I'd arrived at the inspirational vision of Faith which needs to be kept before our eyes, especially when we are faced with what seems to be the irreversible destruction of ecosystems, large and small. The challenge now is to keep the vision alive and active in daily life.

Much encouragement was received from Mary who is a TV producer and environmental adviser to the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. I recognised that Mary spoke from that place of unity,

serious but joyful at the same time. What a gift from one who knows through her film-making experience, the tragic destruction of beautiful creatures and majestic habitat. Her quote in the retreat booklet reads "Nature exposes the face of God in its beauty, its mystery and its ability to engender awe, wonder and fear...".

In the afternoons many of us enjoyed walking in the surrounding countryside. A visit to a nearby Rock Chapel, set on the top of a hill in woodland, was a particularly special experience – witnessing its holy interior and having time for solitude in nature and God. A prayer maze was also a popular spot for meditating, surrounded by beautiful hills and woodland. There were many places to simply sit quietly and contemplate.

Some of us made use of the art-room where there was a good variety of media and material to inspire one's creative side. A friendly cat whose owner was on leave at the time, provided company, looking for a chance to enter this inviting room with its cushions and rugs laid out amongst bookcases /coffee tables displaying art books.



St Beuno's is such a welcoming place and the Jesuits most accommodating. Mass was said each afternoon in the main chapel which was a wonderful meeting place. Each day on the retreat complimented the Gospel readings beautifully.

The retreat has challenged me to view life differently. There is much we can do as individuals, in the face of climate change and its effects, simply by putting

trust in God and focusing on a transformed creation through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

One inspirational moment shared by the group on the final day of retreat is worth a mention. We were walking the stations of the Cross, praying for Creation when we noticed what looked like a shining jewel, displaying bright reds, greens, and in fact the full rainbow spectrum, depending on which way you looked at it. This gem was suspended from a twig in the middle of a shrub. It was a drop of dew and we could imagine that this was a sign from God that we were all united within this single drop of dew, something so small, hidden, delicate and dazzlingly beautiful, in that particular moment in time. The dew-drop teaches us that the key to unity is to rejoice in God always!

For the 2012 programme and further information, contact secretary@beunos.com or 01745 583444

Southwark JPIC Office, Cathedral House,
Westminster Bridge Rd, London, SE1 7HY
020 7928 9742 office@southwarkjandp.co.uk