

# Celebrating Thirty Years of Working for Peace and Social Justice

Over 350 people gathered at Swanwick, Derbyshire to take part in the 30<sup>th</sup> Conference organised by The National Justice and Peace Network, bringing together justice and peace activists from all areas of England and Wales. This was indeed a celebration of commitment and enthusiasm, together with the firm conviction that as a profession of our faith we are called both individually and collectively to work for peace and social justice.

The theme for the weekend, '**Hear My People Cry**' explored the implications of "doing justice" in the places where we live and work. Archdiocese of Liverpool Justice and Peace Commission members prepared and facilitated the programme; 'The Tongues of Fire' Music Ministry team enabled us to integrate the themes and discussions into our worship in a vibrant way.

## **"See, Judge, Act"**

In his introduction **Fr. Tom Cullinan** suggested that we develop the art of seeing through the eyes of the other, recognising the need to reflect and pray about issues in order to re-engage. We are then able to make judgements about our own position. Fr. Tom reminded us that we are not called to solve the problems of the world, just to make a contribution. We must consider whether our decisions in life enable rather than disable and before taking action must try to discern what our own charisms/blessings happen to be.

## **"Eucharist is a source of solidarity with the oppressed"**

The keynote speaker on Friday evening was **Sr. Margaret Scott** who spoke of her two passions, Eucharist and social justice, and proposed that there is an inseparable relationship between Eucharist, the poor and work for social justice. She believes that "Eucharist is a source of solidarity with the oppressed and nourishment to our commitment to social justice". Eucharist is a theological foundation for those who work for social justice but this is within a culture seemingly obsessed with "shopping and shooting" Sr. Margaret believes that in Eucharist, there is room at the table for those whose presence may disturb or shock. We were urged hear the word of the Lord in the readings, then make it present in "giving life to the world in our here and now" We become a community in the breaking of the bread and the words 'do this in memory of me' urge us to reach out into solidarity and social justice. Sr. Margaret challenged us to "see the world through Eucharistic eyes".

## **"Trust in the potential of the poor"**

**Fr. Patrick Riordan SJ** referred to familiar texts from Catholic social thought and reflected upon these texts in the light of what he identified as "market fundamentalism" Fr. Pat preferred to speak of Catholic Social **learning**, a process of discovering how to avoid imposing the will of one upon another, we invite a free response. He proposed that if we take seriously the message of Pope Paul 6th (*Evangelii Nunciandi*) we are looking at the whole of creation through the eye of the Gospel. The message is both radical and profound, speaking of both the personal and collective conscience. We are upsetting people through the power of the gospel. We were reminded that we are to be in solidarity with each other (*Gaudium et Spes*). We must continually think about how we evaluate our cooperative values in the light of the gospel. Fr. Pat believes that in many instances we are alienated by our own actions and our lives become dictated by the systems we have created. We define ourselves by what we do rather than by what we are. He believes that "we make ourselves less than what we are" Although we recognise a common humanity we keep others out. People, usually the poor, are excluded from participating in our market economy and prevented from sharing the benefits. Catholic social teaching demands that all are given a chance to live a full life, we must "trust in the potential of the poor" instead, our society speaks more of the rights of the individual than of the collective good. We must allow ourselves to be changed in the light of the gospels. We were reminded that we must "speak prophetically to our society"

## **"Those who aren't struggling are dead"**

Many listeners were moved to tears as they listened to **Ivanete de Araújo** relating her experience of her family's homelessness on the streets of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The urban problem continues to increase as more people move into the cities in search of a better life. She is now the elected

representative, on the city council in Sao Paulo, for families who are homeless or inadequately housed and is Head of Advocacy for the organisation Apoio (support) and works as a CAFOD partner. She spoke of the journey, working on the plantations from the age of eight, moving to the city at fifteen years old to help support her family, ending up in despair as she and her children were left with nothing. She spoke of feeling degraded, living under a viaduct without any dignity “I felt my life had ended then” Ivanete began to recognise that she had rights and when CAFOD “threw down a rope I climbed up that rope” She recalls that she then became a rope for other families, not begging but asking for the right to a home, as stated in the constitution. Sao Paulo is a city of contrast, great wealth and great poverty with many empty buildings. Ivanete spoke of the struggle of many families on low income to find a home which would meet basic needs. She told of her work and described it as a constant battle but with the support of CAFOD and Apoio people are finding the strength and will power to work together for justice and peace. She concluded with a saying used in her community “ those who aren’t struggling are dead”

### ***How do we achieve social spirituality?***

**John Battle**, Member of Parliament for West Leeds focused on seeking justice “where we live” Where is the social justice in the life of the cities, in the challenges and pressure of life to be found there? John spoke of life in his section of the city. People move in and out quickly and in such cases building stability is a challenge. Many are caught in the credit trap. John believes that there exists a network of informal community support but that there is a need for those involved in working for social justice to help build structures linking together social justice, social citizenship and social spirituality. He believes that we should be looking at social issues at a local level, asking ourselves where is our local church in all this. John’s challenge to our Justice and Peace Network is to be further engaging at grass roots level calling groups together. A further challenge would be to consider who are our neighbours? Would it be easier to compile a list of those who we would not wish to be part of our community? Using the image of the Abbey and the prison, standing at opposite sides of the neighbourhood, John asks each of us to consider how the Abbey relates to the prison and the prison to the Abbey. How do we achieve social spirituality?

### ***Talk, Shop, Dance***

Those present at the conference were able to choose two workshops from a range of options covering local, national and global issues. The ‘**Just Fair**’ provided an opportunity for groups and agencies to display goods and resources together with ideas for practical action. Interactive games were set up on the lawn, allowing participants to engage with complex dilemmas in an atmosphere of fun. After all the hard work there was an opportunity for relaxation and informal discussion, and dancing for the more energetic.

### ***Children and Young People***

The children took part in activities relating to the Conference theme and shared the outcome of their sessions as they took part in the liturgies. The young people used the see, judge and act approach to address issues of social justice through practical activities in their peer led groups. Their contribution to the liturgy reminded us just how much our young people have to offer to the Church, given opportunity and positive leadership.

### ***Christ is already there ahead of us***

We left the Conference with renewed energy and conviction, both spiritually and mentally refreshed, having celebrated together in our closing liturgy at which Archbishop Patrick Kelly from Liverpool presided and preached.

We remember that in developing fellowship and relationships we each carry the Kingdom within us. The Holy Spirit wanders where she will. We are not bringing Christ into the lives of others, Christ is already there ahead of us. We are acknowledging what is.

*Anne Peacey*

*July 2008*