

NJPN Quarterly Meeting: 1 October 2005

NJPN quarterly meetings have traditionally taken place at CAFOD's Brixton office, apart from a brief period at Eccleston Square during refurbishment. The October 1st meeting took place in historic York, rather than the capital city, with the modern CAFOD meeting room exchanged for English Martyrs parish hall. Members of the Middlesbrough Commission provided a warm welcome.

Minutes of the meeting will be circulated in due course. The purpose of this offering is to give a flavour of the meeting, particularly for the many unable to attend, either because of a clash of events or of challenging geography, and also highlight forthcoming actions.

The new exec has obviously been busy, with "away days" at Park Place in early September. Perhaps the executive report could better highlight key developments. It was agreed that the NJPN e-mailing list will be combined with the e-mail list of 150 compiled at conference. Expect to receive statements from Bishops' Conference, CAP & CIIR e-bulletins etc - an example of networking. Steve Atherton asked what other networking is of value:

- sharing good practise to avoid re-inventing the wheel
- a monthly "e-digest" to provide up to date info
- any further ideas to the Administrator please!

The role of Bishop Kieron Conry as "NJPN bishop" has yet to be defined. His wish "to walk alongside us" was welcomed.

There were some common themes in the **Diocesan Reports**:

- a strong presence in Edinburgh on 2 July and local actions on White Band Days
- engaging with younger people
- development of environmental concerns catalysed by conference
- working ecumenically
- Fairtrade status

John Devine, Churches' Officer, NW Development Agency was mentioned as a key figure on links between faith groups and local government for Liverpool & Lancaster commissions.

The Westminster At Your Word Lord programme includes a 6 week course entitled Renew the Face of the Earth, with a good action pack and strong emphasis on Catholic Social Teaching

Barbara Hungin explained how the Mary Thompson Fund has grown out of a collection for displaced asylum seekers at Mary's requiem mass in 2000. This hardship fund operates in the Teesside area. It gained national publicity when 10 people attempted to live on the £5 and bag of food that the fund provides to those with nothing, resulting in donations being received. Since 2000, the ethnic diversity of the area has increased as asylum seekers have arrived after dispersal, there is good ecumenical cooperation, drop-in centres operate and the fund provides an annual visit to Whitby. An application for Charitable Status is in progress, which will make more funding possibilities available. An unfortunate but necessary drain on resources is provision of transport to Liverpool for asylum claims to be made. The granting of refugee status can make for housing difficulties, since £55/week is insufficient for accommodation. Alison suggested that Cleveland Housing Advice Centre should be able to help.

Anwar, an asylum seeker from Iraq, gave an account of his experiences. After a period in Ashford, where he found support from the Jehovah's Witnesses community, he was dispersed to Teesside. He found bible study a good way to learn English, and has since been baptised in the Methodist Church. Not being allowed to work, he is continuing to study and volunteer as an interpreter at a drop-in centre. He finds the Qur'an too focussed on violence and has written critically on this. He experiences nightmare images of life in Iraq and sees little hope of seeing a peaceful Iraq for decades. Home Office policy of forced returns seems incredible in the light of the instability. Anwar spoke of inconsistency over period of residency required to open a bank account and a black market in vouchers.

In response to the desperate situation in Iraq, Kevin suggested a "crusade of prayer", probably reforming the coalition of agencies which launched the prayer card in 2001.

Conf 2006 21-23 July, entitled The Desert will Bloom Scattering Seeds of Hope. Main speakers: Jim O'Keefe will have a key role, other speakers being Helen Costigane, a lecturer in Christian Ethics, and Lucinda Wogan, working to combat sex trafficking. Panel to give impressions of conference. There will be an integrated youth programme. Paul Donovan to be responsible for communications & media

An **Environment Working Party**, facilitated by Christine Allen, has been set up as a result of a conference fringe meeting.

Evaluation

The idea of an out of London meeting was valued, there is likely to be another one next year.

Anwar's testimony well received, as was the whole Middlesbrough presentation.

Good sharing in Diocesan and Agency reports.