

Creative inspiration and ethical dilemmas

NJPN in London 29th September 2007

Going to London on the early morning train on Saturday is always fun, especially now that you can go First Class for £9.25 - probably not for much longer, but it's nice while it lasts. So I travel in style, in an almost empty carriage, and use my Oyster [just like a real Londoner!] for the journey from Kings Cross to Brixton and the CAFOD office in Romero Close.

One of the joys of NJPN is seeing old friends and meeting new ones, but soon we get down to work on a varied and challenging agenda. Highlights? A long and careful discussion of the issue of worship at ecumenical gatherings such as the Annual Conference was important for me, because it helped me realise how hurtful and distressing it is when people who've come together to work for justice and peace then have to separate when it is time for prayer. We do not know what is to be done about this, but none of us doesn't recognize the pain.

The reports from the groups is always an amazing experience - all that energy and creative thinking and solidarity and vision! I was especially impressed by the work being done in Bristol on climate change and environmental issues, with strong support from the Bishop, Declan Lang. You can find out more about the Sound of Many Waters project at www.soundofmanywaters.org I admire the work with refugees and asylum seekers being done in Hexham and Newcastle, where 40+ churches contribute to practical support - food and clothing and so on. I'm involved in a smaller scale project, so I know how much work that takes. I was pleased that work being done in my own diocese - Nottingham - on a constitution for the Justice and Peace Commission was of interest to other NJPN members.

One of the joys of CAFOD is the Portuguese snack bar over the road, and so fortified by the best custard tarts in Europe, the meeting moved into the afternoon. We had to discuss the question of the response we - as a Catholic organization - should make to the decision by Amnesty International to support access to abortion for women in war zones and situations of violence. All of us are unhappy at the thought of breaking a long connection with an organization whose work we value and respect; but we recognise the importance of the issue, because it is about how we define 'the human' - and the Catholic perception that we do not have the right to 'define out' of the human any class of human beings, however small and silent that group may be. Can campaigners for peace ever propose that an act of violence - abortion - is the proper response to another act of violence - rape?

Going home I have much to think about. Glad of that First Class ticket!

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