

NJPN Open networking Meeting - September 2010

Putting together community, campaigning and culture under the umbrella of ecumenical peacemaking, Clive Barrett, who works for the West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council, gave us a talk that was both heart-warming and challenging. Heart-warming because he made me realise that we are on the right lines in our J&P work, which in many places is now ecumenical and even interfaith. Challenging because we still have so much to do particularly in ensuring peace making is central to our work.

His Anglican Pacifist background and his practical experience shone through his words. A youth choir singing at a dinner for the elderly was an example of building community across generations. Taking care to listen: the answers to the question "What does peace mean for you?" In one area wasn't "Ban the Bomb" but "Walking down the street feeling I am safe" and "Non-violent family relationships."

But being active in the local community and being aware of the culture around him hasn't stopped Clive campaigning. In fact it seems to have encouraged his activism, whether by being involved in local leafleting to counter BNP, gathering materials for a local peace museum and travelling display or being part of large national demonstrations against nuclear weapons and wars of mass destruction.

None of this seems to have damaged his ecumenical work. Maybe it has made others think.

He pointed out we don't live in a culture of peace and we need to work at correcting that by bringing to the public's attention people who have stood against the grain, such as those who were imprisoned in Richmond Castle during the 1st world war for refusing to fight. There was an assumption in those days that the churches would be in the forefront of peace making and supporting Conscientious Objectors. I wonder if that is still a realistic assumption.

The warm welcome and pleasant environment we received at Oxford Place in Leeds contributed to our enjoyment of Clive's input and the rest of the meeting. We had the opportunity to mingle with new people as well as to pick up useful materials and to hear and read about agency and diocesan highlights. It was good to welcome people from the Anglican Diocese of Ripon and Leeds. But sadly only 20+ people attended. This speaker was worth a far bigger audience and networking doesn't really happen if fewer than half the dioceses of England and Wales and only 7 agencies are represented. Leeds is not difficult to get to so I am left with the question "Why don't more people come to our quarterly networking meetings."

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