

The e-bulletin for the North West, linked to the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), is produced jointly within the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Please send diary dates to anneoc980@hotmail.com

Heather Kiernan writes: Last night I read again the beautifully poignant poem of Madeleine L'Engle "The Risk of Birth" and thought of the words of Pope Francis during his visit on Sunday to Lesbos: "Please let us stop this shipwreck of civilization." (see opposite)

THE RISK OF BIRTH

This is no time for a child to be born,
With the earth betrayed by war & hate
And a comet slashing the sky to warn
That time runs out & the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born,
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
Honour & truth were trampled by scorn -
Yet here did the Saviour make his home.

When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth,
And by a comet the sky is torn -
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

Madeleine L'Engle

BORN OUTDOORS

Born outside, not in the open air beneath a star-lit sky
but in the night-dark cave beneath the streets;
not amidst the standing summer wheat
but in the gathered winnowed straw
now scattered as your birthing sheet.

Not in the wilds but on the edge of human habitation,
with ox and ass as birth-partner and midwife,
bovine lowing and asinine hee-hawing
ringing out in counterpoint to Mary's screams.

Born as you would die, outwith the gate,
to unhinge our doors and upturn all our barricades
and make the place of death, Skull Hill,
the birthing place of endless life.

Outdoors because there are no limits here
but only your weak-limbed infantile embrace,
helpless on the straw and then, three decades hence,
helpless on the wooden cross once more.

Dying outside just as you were born,
inside our pain,
that we might never need
to dwell outside your love.

From *An Invaded Life*, a book of poetry by Fr. Rob Esdaile

POPE FRANCIS VISITS LESBOS

Pope Francis today (Sunday, 5 December) returned to the massive refugee camp on the island of Lesbos - five years after his first visit. Thousands of people from the 'Reception and Identification Centre' of Mytilene camp came to greet the Holy Father. During his visit he met many refugees and heard their stories.

He told them: "I am here once again, to meet you and to assure you of my closeness. I say it from the heart. I am here to see your faces and look into your eyes. Eyes full of fear and expectancy, eyes that have seen violence and poverty, eyes streaked by too many tears."

Quoting Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, he said: "those who are afraid of you have not looked you in the eye... They have forgotten that migration is not an issue for the Middle East and Northern Africa, for Europe and Greece. It is an issue for the world."

The Pope asked every man and woman, "to overcome the paralysis of fear, the indifference that kills, the cynical disregard that nonchalantly condemns to death those on the fringes."

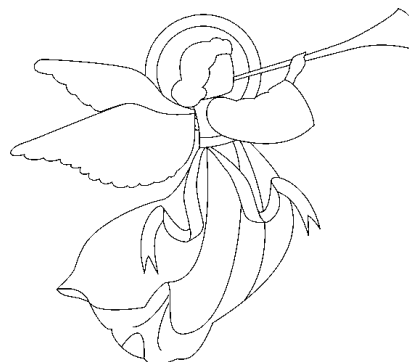
"Let us not let our sea be transformed into a desolate sea of death. Let us not allow this place of encounter to become a theatre of conflict. Let us not permit this "sea of memories" to be transformed into a "sea of forgetfulness". Please, let us stop this shipwreck of civilization." <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/43606>

SONG OF THE ANGELS

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman, Fellowship of Reconciliation, USA



'CRUEL' NATIONALITY AND BORDERS BILL PASSES THIRD READING

8 December 2021: The Nationality and Borders Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on Wednesday afternoon, with 298 MPs in support and 231 against, giving the government a majority of 67 votes on its controversial overhaul of the immigration system.

The Bill make it much more difficult for refugees to seek asylum in the UK and makes it illegal for British subjects to help migrants. It authorises border forces to turn back dinghies in the Channel and proposes that those seeking asylum should be kept in off-shore 'processing centres'.

Critics say the Bill will create a 'second-tier category of citizenship' by giving the government powers to strip a naturalised person of their citizenship without notice.

Office of National Statistics data suggests that nearly six million people in England and Wales could be affected by the change, including two in every five people from non-white ethnic minorities compared to one in 20 white people. This figure includes almost 410,000 dual nationals born in the UK, as well as 5.2 million people born abroad. These 5.2 million people could potentially be stripped of their citizenship even where doing so would render them stateless.

Campaigners and MPs have raised concerns over the impact of the bill on human rights. A report from Freedom From Torture concluded that the Bill represented "the biggest legal assault on international refugee law ever seen in the UK". Earlier this year, Sarah Teather, director of Jesuit Refugee Service described the proposed legislation as: "deeply cruel, impractical, and destructive to the common good."

First responses to the vote:

Bishop William Nolan and Jill Kent, President and Chair of Justice and Peace Scotland said in a statement: "The UK government's Nationality and Borders Bill represents a disgraceful attack on vulnerable people. At its heart is a deliberate misrepresentation of the lives of asylum seekers and the risks which they are driven to in order to seek safety.

"We share the concerns voiced by the UNHCR, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, senior police, and the unanimous voice of all those who work directly with asylum seekers and victims of modern slavery that this Bill will not achieve its aims. Their fears that this Bill will make the situation worse for all those seeking safety, that the government is breaking international law by criminalising the seeking of asylum through irregular means, and that contrary to the government's claims this will drive desperate people into the hands of traffickers where they risk exploitation and abuse.

"We continue to stand in solidarity with all those who are displaced, with all those who with generosity of heart seek to welcome the stranger and echo the words of His Holiness Pope Francis this week in Greece who reminded us that 'only if it is reconciled with the most vulnerable will the future be prosperous. When we reject the poor, we reject peace.' "

Katrina Alton from the Sisters of St Joseph of Peace tweeted the the Bill "criminalizes those seeking refugee and asylum in the UK and gives the Home Secretary the power to strip UK citizens of their citizenship. What a day for democracy when the House of Lords is our last hope!"

Apsana Begum MP for Poplar and Limehouse tweeted: "The Tories have just forced through #NationalityandBordersBill - with loud cheers from their MPs. The suffering this Bill will cause to the most vulnerable people is immeasurable. They are despicable."

Restore, a project of Birmingham Churches Together which supported migrants and refugees, tweeted: "Massively disappointing news but this is a setback not an ending. The campaign goes on. Asylum seekers should have the right to work to take them out of poverty, use their skills, contribute to the economy and aid integration."

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/43630>

LORD KERR DEMOLISHES PRITI PATEL'S 'ECONOMIC MIGRANTS' NARRATIVE WITH THREE SIMPLE FACTS

Liam O'Dell 29 November 2021 *The Independent*: Social media users have rushed to heap praise on Lord Kerr of Kenlochard and his contribution to a debate on migrants held in the House of Lords last Thursday afternoon. It came just hours after it was reported that 27 people had died when their boat sank during an attempted crossing of the English Channel. The first victim of the tragedy, 24-year-old Kurdish student Maryam Nuri Hamdamin, was identified on Friday.

While the debate – moved by former Vauxhall MP Baroness Hoey - was about "the number of migrants arriving in the United Kingdom illegally by boat", Lord Kerr offered up a more sympathetic approach. "I would just like to contribute three sets of facts," the crossbench peer said. "First, overall refugee numbers [are] currently running at about half of where they were 20 years ago. We are not the preferred destination in Europe; we are, as Lady Hamwee said, well down the list of preferred destinations."

He then moved on to small boat numbers, which he conceded were up, "partly" because of "the fences, the patrols [and] the heat sensors around the train tracks and marshalling yards" driving people towards "the even more dangerous sea route".

"But the principal reason why clandestine numbers are up, is that official resettlement routes are shut," he added. "Our schemes, in practice, no longer exist. We have closed the Syrian scheme, we have scrapped the Dubs scheme, we have left Dublin III [and] we haven't got an Afghan scheme up and running."

Moving on to statistics, Lord Kerr said that in terms of nationality, the largest group crossing the channel in the past 18 months were Iranians, with 3,187 citizens making the journey. In the same period, he said, only one entered the UK through the official route. "How many came from Yemen in these 18 months? Yemen, riven by civil war and famine. None - by the official route - not one."

Two facts down, one to go, and it was then that he turned to comments made by Priti Patel to the Lords' Home Affairs and Justice Committee in October. Ms Patel told peers: "In the last year, 70 per cent of individuals on small boats are single men who are effectively economic migrants. They are not genuine asylum seekers."

"That is plainly not true," Lord Kerr said on Thursday, citing statistics from her own department which revealed that "virtually all" of the top 10 nationalities arriving in small boats seek asylum. 61 per cent are granted it "at the initial stage" and 59 per cent receive it on appeal, he said. "The facts suggest that well over 70 per cent of asylum seekers coming across the channel in small boats are genuine asylum seekers, not economic migrants. That is hardly surprising because the top four countries they come from are Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Syria ... These people are fleeing persecution and destitution, and the sea route from France is the only one open to many of them."

He concluded his contribution by warning "unless we provide a safe route" for asylum seekers, "we are complicit with the people smugglers. Yes, we can condemn their case. Yes, we mourn yesterday's dead, but that does not seem to stop us planning to break with the refugee convention. Our compassion is well controlled, because it does not stop us planning - in the borders Bill - to criminalise those who survive the peril of the seas, and those at Dover who try to help them. Of course, we can go down that road, but if we do, let's at least be honest. Let's be honest enough to admit that what drives us down that road is sheer political prejudice, not the facts, because the facts do not support the case for cruelty," he said. <https://www.indy100.com/news/refugees-migrants-priti-patel-lord-kerr-b1965324>

CALLS FOR FAITHS TO BE PEACEMAKERS

Ellen Teague 25 November 2021 *The Tablet*

Calls for peace education programmes, divestment from companies producing weapons of war, and support for the Movement for the Abolition of War were among the campaigns suggested at the end of a Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament event in Oxford last Saturday.

Held at the Quaker House in Oxford, "Building Bridges for Peace" is an annual event to remember Barbara Eggleston, the campaign's first coordinator who died 17 years ago. Steve Hucklesby, of the joint public issues team, chaired the part of the day dedicated to campaigning for peace. The interfaith event looked at the ways in which teachings of peace and nonviolence in sacred writings can build bridges between different faiths and cultures.

Dr Maria Power, a fellow of Blackfriars Hall where she is a senior research fellow in human dignity at the Las Casas Institute for Social Justice, examined the causes of structural violence from a Christian perspective. She highlighted poverty, injustice and racism as among the underlying causes of conflict and how Catholic social teaching suggests ways to build bridges for peace and read the "signs of the times".

Muslim scholar Dr Kamel Ait Tahar, who memorised the Qu'ran at the age of 17 and is Muslim chaplain to the High Sheriff of Oxford, told the gathering that the word "Islam" means "peace". He said: "The Qu'ran recognises the vital need for society to live in peace and security." More than 250 verses refer to peace. "Peace needs to be aligned with justice," he added.

Vijay Mehta, a Hindu peace activist and chair of Uniting for Peace, whose books include *The Economics of Killing*, *Peace Beyond Borders* and *How Not to Go to War*, voiced his belief that faiths must work together for peace. He felt religions "should be the first to raise a voice against nuclear weapons and the propaganda of deterrence". He said "Departments for peace and peace centres worldwide are steps in the right direction, which will spread non-violence and a culture of peace and this will ultimately put an end to a culture of militarism, violence, and war."

Buddhist speaker Roslyn Cook spoke about being a member of Soka Gakkai International, a global community-based anti-nuclear Buddhist organisation accredited to the United Nations. A CND Council member, she has lobbied for the abolition of nuclear weapons and for climate justice. She has called for ecocide to be recognised as a crime in international law and advocates the need for inner transformation to bring enlightenment.

Around 25 people attended the day in person and a similar number online. The international prayer for peace concluded the day.

Meanwhile, CNS reported that the icon of the Holy Family of Divine Will of Unity and Peace is being taken around Lebanon and will be taken to Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan. "Mary, Joseph and Jesus were a family, and they were holy. But they were not one to the exclusion of the other," said Episcopal Committee of Justice and Peace of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East.

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/14724/calls-for-faiths-to-be-peacemakers->

BLOG: HOPE AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS: WATER MUSIC

*My life flows on in endless song
Above earth's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, tho' far-off hymn
That hails a new creation;
Thro' all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—
How can I keep from singing? — Robert Lowry, 1869*

Finally, water – the long black plastic pipe first gurgles, expectant, then jumps to life with an unruly gush. We cheer, those of us who hold its sudden weight, and begin running it back and forth while Nick takes the end and tries to control the torrent. He drenches this dusty aloe, that lanky sapling, then fills the shallow channels dug into the dirt, which like fractal veins carry this salvation right across the grove.

This shouldn't be happening. The arterial river runs right next to us, or should. In spring, when the snowmelt tumbles off the sierra, the river swells half a mile wide, but it ran dry months ago and the autumn rains are late again. The Andalusian sun still bakes the ground daily. Even the evergreen, ever-patient olives, now close to harvest, are wrinkled for want of water.

For weeks, the water pit has gaped empty, and now the giant steel cistern is down to the dregs too. Until the river comes back, every cup counts. When we're done with the puddle's-worth we use for the washing up, we pour it under whichever plant seems to need it most. We wee strategically, under a different tree each time. There's no shower; you climb the hill to a neighbour's inch-deep irrigation channel no wider than your hips, and splash away.

It's been expensive to run this pipe a mile or so down-valley to a diesel pump, and in just two hours it'll be shut off, but until then it's playtime. Wherever the water strikes the ground, grey dust turns to black mud in an instant, like a spell. Rubbing it between finger and thumb, it's possible to believe once again that this is soil, the ground of all life. By noon the next day, the same ground is back to bone-dry, but Nick checks the olives and they're plumping up...

A month on and these daydreams of Andalusia swim back to me as we wade through floodwater outside Falkirk. It sluices sideways off the farms and over the towpath, sloshing over our sodden boots. Bridges tip their streams onto the path in a brash clatter. The canal simmers with the downfall, silver in the half-light.

All is drunk with the deluge. The grasses, laden with it, sprawl across our way. It rolls in languid, heavy drops over the umbers and ochres of old oaks and beeches. It hangs from new haws in hundreds of glass beads, each one holding the world still, preserving it perfectly upside-down.

Few of us know this land well, but as we make our way west, the company of its life has been introducing itself. From the curlew's clarion purl on the estuary to the private symbiosis of lichens along the canal, we've all been getting acquainted.

But the infrastructure of violence has been with us, too. We've skirted the aristocrat's estate, passed the place warships are made, picked out pellets from the plastic factory washed up on the strand. Last night, we climbed to the crest of a bluff and looked down on the massive oil refinery at Grangemouth, wondering at the alien noises that burst sporadically from its tangle of pipes and towers. I thought of the Babylonian patriarch Nebuchadnezzar, who with biblical hubris looked down from his palace: 'Is this not Babylon the Great, which I myself have built by the might of my power... for the glory of my majesty?'

It hit home that this unintelligible machinery pumps power to our shopping malls, motorways, and mail-order warehouses, and to the oil wars that keep the whole torpid phantasmagoria artificially alive. And I recognise myself in it, too, it has shaped my whole life. The entire complex glistens up from the mudflats, lit a sickly orange by flaring gas-stacks and security lights, and I feel I'm looking in a mirror.

Our walk bears towards the COP26 climate summit on the ancient pattern of a pilgrimage. But as with all pilgrimage, the true destination is not a place on a map but a change within us, a turn of the heart. The point is not in getting there but in returning home afterwards: more alive, more present – more available, as the Taizé abbot Frère Roger once put it.

Our walk is just a walk, but it's one with intention. If Babylon's machinery is pushing Kiribati under the sea today, we want to hold this knowledge tight and keep asking what that means for us and our society. We don't want to forget, either, the children waiting for us in the wet to show us the posters they made to encourage us to care for all life. Or the community choir who stand around them, coats dripping: 'Thro' all the tumult and the strife I hear the music ringing; / It finds an echo in my soul— how can we keep from singing?' We let their song soak in with the rain.

And although Nebuchadnezzar's story confronts the vanity and corruption of our own society's ways, I want to remember that it's also a fable of forgiveness and hope. For all his hubris, the biblical story spares the king from death. He was sent instead into exile to live in the wild among the animals. His freedom would be restored, but not until he was 'drenched in the dew of heaven' – until the arid patriarch learned for the first time his place on earth.

Today we crossed the watershed. All day, the rain's been crackling off our hoods. Now and then we let it land in our hair and listen to the susurrating canal guiding us on to Glasgow. Along the way, these notes of falling water have been an enchantment all of their own, bathing us in their music. And as we move through the land, so it has been moving through us, tilting us towards its peace. In a word, it woos. In leading us away, astray, it even seduces – though by no power pushier than the perennially open invitation of our ecological place.

I realise I've been slowly falling towards a feeling of home. We all talk of this or something like this, plumbing for the words, but it speaks most clearly when we fall quiet. We are awed, but that's not the point. Awe comes pretty cheap, as anyone knows who has marvelled from the mountaintop at nature as a distant spectacle. This is different, intimate, a kind of learning. We feel moved, certainly, but we're also being moved, turned around. In coming to know, little by little, the company of this land, our feeling for its worth moves from abstract principle to visceral knowledge. We learn to love it.

We may even be learning the converse: that 'in your loving is your knowing', as the theologian Liz Templeton once insisted. It's a bold a beautiful possibility that certain kinds of knowing – the kinds that keep life well – only come to us once 'loving' matures to be more than a way of feeling, but also a way of thinking. I look up into the rain, watching it fall from high heaven, letting it splash in my face. I'm skin to skin with it now, drenched.

Stepping back, I hear a sceptical voice, too, which wants to interrupt. It's suspicious of the idea that the way out of our ecological emergency is to spend more time wondering at the natural world, any more than it's to fix it with better tech. Doesn't our crisis shake down to a radically relational cleft: a social and political culture that treats much of the life around us as expendable, without worth of its own?

This does indeed seem to be the underlying violence of our predicament, the place where the real hurt comes from. To face it, the imperative has to be justice – social and ecological justice at the level of the biosphere. We don't need to spend time with the trees to know that the likes of Grangemouth are making the whole world sick, sending entire peoples, cultures, species to oblivion.

Or do we?

Very belatedly, I've been taking a closer interest in how elders and activists of indigenous peoples have been talking about the crisis. Without wanting to romanticise their lives, they're clearly better placed to speak than I. They've been living closer to the earth, and to the harm of our latter-day Babylon's domineering violence. And what they have to say is not the aloof, we-can-fix-it narrative that often prevails in climate debate.

Each time I hear indigenous elders speak, in their diversity, about the ecological crisis, a common, twofold refrain comes to the fore. First, the way to survival lies in honouring ecological and social justice, which nature knows as balance. If we think it's about reducing carbon but not righting relationships then we're no further on.

Second, the honouring itself is not found in hollow principles like 'respect for the planet', but in cultivating mutual, close relationships with its living places. You can't save the soil if you don't know what it is, and you won't know what it is if it hasn't spent time under your fingernails – and those of your ancestors.

The repeating plea is not only that we recognise a crisis of ecology as one of injustice, but also that we devote time to the ecology itself as the place we ourselves live. Let's not make the mistake that love without justice is real, but let's not imagine, either, that justice is possible without love – without being in love with the life now held at risk. For the way to love and justice is through attention.

So sink those hands in the loam. Let the rain reach you. Know the long story of the place you call home. Learn, says Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, to read the language of the natural world. Search for the grammar of its animacy, writes Robin Wall Kimmerer, and find there its laws and government, the democracy of species.

After all, this is an inspired world, where even water is alive – especially water, says Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq. All beings belong. You, me, the stranger, the refugee fleeing war and hate and other dried-up places, even the stranded soul of a vain and violent king – we all have a place here with the curlew and the lichen.

Such is the saving knowledge of people who have not lost themselves.

And it's not because people of indigenous cultures are a special kind of human being, but because they still come together to remember their place in the scheme of life – to remember what matters, for it is what they love. As for the rest of us, aren't we all Nebuchadnezzar now? If we are to hope for the same second chance offered him, then we too need to find ways to remember who we are and our ecological place, and so come to know for the first time what it means to be involved in the great society of the earth.

Reaching Glasgow's edge, we stop off at Lambhill Stables, built to rest the weary horses that once worked the waterway. Like their coats then, ours now are soaked right through, though we get to sit, sip hot chocolate, and warm up while we drip.

Out the back, we're led up to a shallow ridge that looks over Possil Marsh, which curves away from us between a line of pylons and the A879. Nearly 150 species of birds have been spotted here, sharing their wetland home with a boggling profusion of beetles and butterflies. Among the marsh's 'ecosystem services' – or 'gifts', as Robin Wall Kimmerer prefers that we imagine them – is to hold safe its share of three billion tons of Britain's peatland carbon.

Like all homes now, this one's future is uncertain. With its wee loch, the marsh is already one of only three natural bodies of water left in the Glasgow area. It has to survive the toxic run-off from roads and farms, the loss of keystone species, the absence of traditional land-work that would keep it in health, and the encroachment of ever-pushy 'development opportunities'. It's surrounded by life out of balance.

As is Lambhill itself, a former mining community where unemployment runs at 32 percent, child poverty at 40 percent. The life expectancy of a boy born here is just 70 years; in South Kensington, it's 82. Evidently, this economically cheated neighbourhood has been written off as one more 'sacrifice zone' in our socio-ecological landscape.

But it's not a hopeless place. For a few years now, the stables have been a community hub, worked by and for the people who live here. We're shown the volunteer café serving good homemade food on a budget, cooked up from the big communal veg patch next door. The stables host a long list of clubs and classes, as well as a low-cost bike repair shop for the local community.

The volunteers are fond of Possil Marsh – it's their manor. During summer, the aquatic and fenland plants burst into colour, among them the pale yellow of the scarce tufted loosestrife. Right now, under the autumn squall, the muted browns and greens remind me of pike skin. A Google review says the marsh makes for a good date. It's certainly a place to fall in love.

Water is everywhere now – beneath our feet in the peat, and still hanging heavy in the clouds in every direction. Not far ahead: Glasgow city, its streets already colonised by corporate marketing in anticipation of COP: big business brandishing its 'green' credentials in stock images of trees and valleys. Soon and with thousands of others, we'll precipitate into the same streets as human rivers of grief and anger and hope.

Far behind now: the community in Andalusia. I can still picture the caked ground, the heat of the wind, the ancient olives – and the open-hearted people, whose hope is just to find a place to live well without adding to all the harm. My stay there was too short. 'You should see it in spring, it explodes everywhere green,' Nick said with a sudden smile as I was leaving. 'I'd love to be here for that,' I said, 'but I need to get back.'

I am still with them, though, waiting in all expectancy for the mountain river to flow again: that 'sweet, tho' far-off hymn / that hails a new creation'.

David Gee 9 December 2021 <https://hopeswork.org/2021/12/09/water-music/>

[LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TARGETED FOR THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH, SAYS BISHOP](#)

Red Wednesday, 24 November 2021, is a day on which we shine a light on the injustice of Christian persecution. Cathedrals, churches and other landmark buildings are lit red as a symbolic gesture to show solidarity with the world's suffering Christians and those of other faiths persecuted for their religious beliefs. This year's focus is on the kidnap, forced marriage and conversion, rape and sexual enslavement of Christian women and girls. The Right Reverend Declan Lang, Bishop of Clifton and Lead Bishop for International Affairs, wants Catholics to join him in prayer for those abused for their faith: "Pope Francis calls us to never 'look the other way and let the dignity of women, especially young women, be trampled upon.' It is essential that we listen to the voices of women and girls who have suffered abduction, violence, or forced marriage, including those targeted because of their Christian faith. I am grateful to Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) for drawing attention to this issue and supporting survivors across the world. As we mark Red Wednesday, I hope that Catholics throughout England and Wales will join me in praying for everyone who has been affected by these human rights abuses and all those working for change." https://www.cbcew.org.uk/red-wednesday-2021/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Newsletter+261121

ACN has published a report that focuses on this persecution – *Hear Her Cries: The kidnapping, forced conversion and sexual victimisation of Christian women and girls*. <https://acnuk.org/hear-her-cries-report/>

SOME NOTES ON CLASS, RELEVANCE AND THE CHURCH

Lynne Cullens: I'm a parish priest in the Anglican Church and I'm going to dive straight in with a story showing why, I believe, class is such an issue for us in terms of Church of England culture.

A couple of years ago I was in a women's regional church leadership meeting. One of the female clergy there relayed the true account of a phone call she had recently received from a young woman who'd called her to ask if she could discuss a strong call to ordination she was feeling. When she arrived, alongside the very working-class accent she'd displayed on the phone, the young woman had leopard-print leggings, Ugg boots, bleached blonde hair and eyelashes thick with mascara, but when she began to speak the member of clergy said she was amazed at how she articulated a passionate personal faith and a sincere and informed vocation to ministry. 'So, did you put her through to the diocese then?' she was asked. 'Oh no!' she laughed, 'Of course not. What would they have made of me sending someone like her through to them?'

God is obviously not just calling the middle-class to serve but our leadership, our Church, is unhealthily and I would say, sinfully, dominated by middle-class culture.

Class, I've found, is the elephant in the room – pretty much every single room – in the Church of England. Middle-class culture is the Anglican default position, so much so that it has been taken as 'that's just the way the church is'. When I began to question that class dominance several years ago I was assured that there were certain small groups that met where working-class clergy could express their discomfort with wider Church culture freely and that that was necessary apparently because 'if they go along to ordinary meetings they just tie up business making gripes about not feeling there's a place for them in the Church and so on'.

So that's the way the Church has been and perhaps in many ways still is, but it isn't the way the church should be. Dominance by one class stands in the way of the abundant flourishing of the whole body of Christ. Jurgen Moltmann writes: 'every kind of class domination, racial discrimination, repression of women, imperialism and dictatorship is a perversion of humankind's designation as the image of God'.

We are each called by God and we should each have opportunity to flourish, to respond, to serve and to experience the abundant fullness of life that Christ promises in John 10. As Church we should be 'answering that of God in everyone' as I understand Quakers term it. And, returning to speak for the Church of England, currently we certainly don't.

So why does it concern me so much?

It might help to understand a bit about what makes me tick. I come from a decidedly working-class background. I've been vegetarian for some years now after many childhood Saturday tea-times spent refusing to eat tripe, tongue, pigs' trotters and the like. I was born in Ordsall in Salford, apparently statistically one of the poorest places in Europe to come from in the 1960's. In fact, I had to smile just recently when, in the same week that Lewis Hamilton was castigated for implying Stevenage was a slum, an Ordsall-born man (Peter Done) who has gone on to become a billionaire, also called Ordsall a slum in the press. In contrast to the outrage expressed after the Stevenage story, there wasn't a single murmur defending Ordsall against the same charge. Tough, tough area...

So, I've come from that background and I know the resilience, intelligence and skills that are needed to navigate any form of successful life from beginnings such as those. And yet I found that, instead of the Church thinking 'Gosh, look at these people from poorer communities with their skills of negotiating challenges, developing a spirit of entrepreneurialism, acquiring the ability to connect and communicate effectively across social barriers and the development of real tenacity and emotional resilience – those skills would be really useful in church leadership positions, particularly in those entering ministry in tougher areas'; instead of thinking any of that, the Church was failing to pick those folk up almost entirely, ignoring them as you heard earlier in fact, and favouring instead the externally placed middle-class leader with a heart for the poor.

So why is that so much of an issue?

I'm currently full-time Priest in Charge of an urban Anglican parish and I am also vice-chair of the National Estate Churches Network (NECN) which is an ecumenical organisation whose aim is to support Christian worshipping communities to thrive on social housing estates nationally. In national Church terms I am a member too of some strategic groups such as one which has recently looked at revising the selection criteria for licensed ministry in the Church of England to enable a wider range of candidates to evidence positively against that process, and I'm shortly to have involvement in the development of policy activity around housing, local communities and the Church.

Prior to ordination I spent many years in a variety of community-based and community facing roles...mostly in management, community development and engagement and for housing companies, local authorities and charities. During those years I developed a deep love for the communities I served partly because I recognised much of me and of my background in many of them.

I also began to see the significance not just of what we do in working-class communities but of who we are...I recognised for instance that I was able to connect with single mums on estates in a way that other staff perhaps couldn't because I was honestly able to say that, as a working-class single mum myself, I could empathise with their background and their issues.

But I felt I could also understand and issue challenge in a way that other staff found difficult to do and that often people responded. And sometimes with amusing results. One evening for instance, whilst working as a housing officer in Stoke-on-Trent, we were preparing to hold a residents' meeting and I'd gone outside the office building to pull down the metal grilles on the windows. As I was bending near the ground to reach the lock I became aware of a very large dog being brought so close to me that I could feel its breath on my face, held on a short, heavy chain by a sombre, black-clothed teenage lad. I slowly stood up and said 'He's a nice dog, what's he called?' 'What the f**k has it got to do with you?' came the response.

Now I could just have walked away but instead found myself saying 'You know, I've come out here just doing my job and you've approached me; with courtesy and respect I've asked you about your dog and you've been rude and abusive to me in response'. I don't think I deserve to be spoken to like that, so let's try that again, should we?' 'I'm going to say He's a nice dog, what's he called and you're going to answer me with the same level of courtesy and respect that I've shown you. Ok...?'

Well the poor lad looked like he wanted the ground to open up and like he wished more than anything that he'd picked on someone else, but undeterred I continued 'He's a nice dog, what's he called?' After what seemed a very long time, while he shuffled about staring at the floor, the young lad muttered 'Err...I don't know.....he's not my dog.'

That incident stayed with me. As we laughed together afterwards, he told me that he was walking the dog for a friend. It was clear that he had reacted poorly because my question had put him outside his comfort zone and instead of losing face, he'd regained a position of strength by swearing at me...and his reaction would have deterred many. It made me wonder how who I am contributed to that, and to so many other, exchanges; it made me wonder how many people in that situation would not have felt able to challenge him in a constructive way that resulted in greater understanding for us both.

In our work in working-class communities, in our mission to working-class communities, it's not just what we do that's important, it's who we are as Church and Church leaders that matters too. How things look on estates, who the working-class can look to as their role models, how people respond and react in those communities can best be understood, challenged and connected to, I would strongly contend, by those from similar backgrounds and with similar life experience. And it's built on that foundation – on the foundation of a firmly working-class background and a professional life working in and alongside working-class communities – that I have come into the Church.

But initially I underestimated the scale of the challenge on this issue, I underestimated how very difficult many in the Church would find accepting, confronting and agreeing to any form of pragmatic action to broaden our culture. Why has it been so difficult? Because middle-class dominance is all pervading and has been, as I said earlier, just the way the church has done business for so long.

This challenge manifests in a number of ways. There's the challenge of the obsession with the academic in the Church for instance. About two years ago I went to a Christian conference in the south of England. Several of the academic speakers there spoke about the working-class and as middle-class themselves, always using a 'they' pronounthey do this, 'they like to drink tea' for instance, or they don't do that, 'they don't eat round a table' and so on. The session I attended really felt like a study in cultural anthropology in fact.

I questioned then, as I have questioned elsewhere, when the working-class get to speak for themselves in the Church, because you wouldn't expect to have a straight person speaking on LGBT issues, or a white person addressing BAME concerns, so why do we continue to have a silent working-class merely portrayed as case studies by middle-class church leaders and theologians? And in terms of the outworking of our faith, does that really matter?

Some while ago I went along to an event looking at the Church's role in tackling poverty, most specifically how we might seek to move towards Pope Francis' vision of a Church of the Poor <https://lynne-cullens.com/2017/11/04/a-response-to-the-church-of-the-poor-conference/>. At that conference there was a presentation from an academic theologian who was based in the working-class parish where I grew up in Old Trafford as a child. Back then – over forty years ago – the clergy and church leadership there were white, male and middle-class, nice enough people but I recall the strong impression that my family and others had locally that they weren't like us. And my family and those locally didn't go to the Church, though I did, walking there a couple of times a week. And so I listened with interest to this man's experience and was deeply saddened to hear that the leadership there were still largely white, male and middle-class and to hear too the same language of 'they' pronouns being used. In forty plus years nothing had changed in that parish. The Church's role should surely be in working to transform, uplift and liberate the poor in our communities and yet there in that community, a community I knew well, the Church had sat for forty plus years and staunchly upheld the status quo; the Church had served to maintain rather than challenge the social and economic injustice around it. That's just not what we are called to do.

So why do the middle-class – often with good hearts and the best of intentions – get it so wrong? And aren't many of us class hybrids to some degree? Yes of course we are. In fact, definitions of class are difficult and, in my case, even perhaps 'flaky' I'm told! I put the following together to try to capture how some working-class stereotypes, descriptors and assumptions that I have had said to me or heard said about others, play out and have played out in my life as someone who identifies as working-class...

I'm working-class

and I'm a member of clergy in the Church of England.

I was born in Ordsall in Salford, my mum was unmarried, we had a tin bath and an outside toilet;

I'm not rough and ready

I'm not illiterate

I do not have difficulties articulating myself

I'm not unsophisticated in my thinking

I don't manage money badly

I don't make poor decisions.

I don't listen to Radio Four

I have no interest whatsoever in The Archers

I have 10 O levels, 4 A levels, two first degrees and am professionally qualified – I have no interest in taking a PhD or in becoming more academic;

I don't play a musical instrument but I love music

I don't invite people to dinner

But often go to the pub with people;

I love humour and comedy,

I'm serious about addressing issues of poverty, inequality and disadvantage;

I don't read for pleasure

I love to learn;

I've never had a dad

I was left to be a lone parent.

My children are academically bright

My children were eligible for free school meals

My children were excluded from parties and faced isolationism and bullying.

My children are now an Oxbridge lawyer, a London accountant-in-training and a law student.

I have been identified as having exceptional strategic vision

I am a former national award-winning charity CEO plus deputy CEO and Director

I have been ignored many times for positions of responsibility within local churches and have been told by middle-class church leaders that they felt there was little leadership ability in me.

I am now a member of several strategy groups within the national church.

I'm a member of clergy in the Church of England

and I'm working class.

Who we are, in all of our complexity, matters. Who we are, as Church leaders in working-class communities, matters. Who we discern as having leadership potential to lead into the future in working-class communities, matters. And continuing to prefer the deployment of middle-class clergy into our working-class communities rather than changing structures and pathways which nurture indigenous leadership – or attempting to square the circle by sending middle-class clergy on placement into working-class areas and thinking that smacks of anything approaching transformation – isn't remotely enough because background and who we are here continues to matter.

A further explanation from the field of psychology feels interesting for me on this. There's a book by a man called Leo Lionni entitled *Fish is Fish*, it's actually a children's picture book but it's cited by psychologists as an illustration of the constructivist nature of our learning. So, the premise of the book is that there is a fish who lives in a pond alongside a tadpole; the tadpole eventually grows into a frog and begins to go up onto dry land. Some while later, the frog returns to the pond and tells the fish what he's seen. The frog describes all kinds of things like birds, cows and people and as the frog explains these things to his friend we see, in a thought bubble over the fish's head, what he imagines all of that to look like....and so for the bird we see him imagining a fish with wings and a tail, for the cow a fish with udders, and for people a fish standing up on its tail and walking upright.

And psychologists say that the book illustrates how our learning is laid down in layers – we are constructivists, meaning we cannot alter the bedrock of who we are, we can only layer new experiences and information over that. So, no matter the length of time they work somewhere or the depth of their compassion, the middle-class will always approach ministry in working-class areas from the perspective of their prior middle-class background. And they will rarely if ever, I would contend, engage as well as someone who is indigenous to that culture.

And I think many of us have seen something of this professionally – staff coming from more comfortable backgrounds visiting homes in arrears of rent or already in substantial debt, where something like a large state-of-the-art television has just been acquired, often on credit. Why would they do that rather than paying off their arrears of rent? It makes no rational sense to plunge themselves deeper into debt. And of course, that's right. It makes no logical sense to do that when you process that decision by layering it, as they do, over their prior experience of coming from stable, respectable home backgrounds.

But if you came from a home that was the subject of neighbourhood mockery, if you were always the kid with the holes in their clothes, if you never had any cause to hold your head up and be proud of who you are, and you now see your children beginning to go through the same, then it starts to make the acquisition of a flashy telly which makes you, for once in your life, the envy of your peers for a short time, make far more sense.

It's no coincidence that we engage best as a Church with the socio-economic groups from which our leadership and senior leadership come but, in doing that, we create an on-going spiral of middle-class leadership who fail to recognise working-class leadership potential or who have insufficient confidence in anything other than middle-class manifestations of leadership traits, and thus continue to spot only their peers for leadership positions.

It's vital to our mission, future engagement and relevance to a much broader swathe of the population that we widen our perspective, that we actively seek to populate our leadership more broadly and with those from backgrounds and with frames of reference and skill sets that are currently lacking in the church.

There are millions of working-class people living on estates and from solid working-class areas who are intelligent, articulate, resilient and with strong skill sets and passionate faith. And millions who are being excluded currently from the church by a leadership who display – no matter how good natured – a crippling lack of relevance to their lives.

So what needs to happen?

The Church of England is thankfully opening to the reality of this issue of culture and indeed to the significant missional potential in seeking to address it, but there's no room for complacency or for doing half a job.

We need nothing less than for this to be a gateway generation in the Church. For the gifted, committed, compassionate visionaries in our middle-class leadership to pledge to be the generation that enables working-class leaders to come forward and lead in our own communities, to speak for our own communities, to grow faith and Church in our own communities.

Gateways, not – with good hearts but misguided intentions – gatekeepers.

I'm working-class

and I'm a member of clergy ... in a growing urban working-class church, in the Church of England

<https://lynnecullens.com/2019/02/15/some-notes-on-class-relevance-and-the-church/>

OUR COOKERY BOOK: MAKING FOOD, MAKING FRIENDS

Our Cookery Book is an inspirational recipe book compiled by members of the Self-Reliant Groups supported by Church Action on Poverty across Greater Manchester and North West England. In the book, under the tagline 'Making food, Making Friends', SRG members share recipes, together with stories about what cooking and sharing the food has meant to them in their lives.

The delicious, easy recipes in the book, priced at only £5, make it a perfect gift to buy this Christmas (or any other time), and you will be supporting Self-Reliant Groups!

<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/ourcookerybook/>

Order your copy here: <https://churchpoverty.netdonor.net/page/91500/donate/1>

https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/srg/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=engagingnetworks&utm_campaign=selfreliantgroups&utm_content=2021+12+08+Christmas+cookbook

POETRY, CHILDREN AND IMAGINATION

We are born into a world of rhythm – from the heartbeat in the womb to the pulses of the seasons – and children have a natural sense of when a rhyme is coming. One of Britain’s best-loved poets argues that verse has a vital role to play in nurturing a child’s literacy and inventiveness.

Roger McGough 25 November 2021 *The Tablet*

We are living in dark times: powerful nations at war with one another, or seemingly about to be; uninspiring, untrustworthy leaders; the pandemic, climate change, blah-blah-blah. Little wonder then that anxiety levels are rising exponentially, and among children especially.

Can poetry help? It certainly can. Reading and, more particularly, writing it can be an escape. It enables us to move out of our own limited world to a world of unlimited possibilities where we can be anybody, do anything. A chance to play the hero, solve the case, score the goal, even settle old scores. The writer, being in control of his or her own destiny, can guarantee a happy ending. Writing a poem can also be a way of telling others about our real lives, our fears and problems, because the very act of writing is a way of reaching out to somebody, for what is written demands a reader or a listener. And the key is one that we are all born with: imagination. A key that can be mislaid, lost or simply taken away, all too often by an educational system whose emphasis is on facts, information and qualifications.

“We are all geniuses up to the age of 10,” said Aldous Huxley, and your child is no exception. From the moment they can talk until the moment that parents and teachers finally convince them that what they have to say is either incorrect or unimportant, children are producing poetry all the time. In fact, I believe that all children are poets before they go to school, in the way that they picture the world and choose the words to describe it.

I remember, for example, my son running into the house crying, “Mummy, mummy, a flower bit me.” In fact, it was a thorn from a rose bush. “Look daddy, the candle is crying.” If we are not careful, as teachers and parents, we find ourselves saying, “Don’t be silly, flowers don’t have teeth and candles don’t cry, it’s all to do with molecules, go and look it up on Google.” We squash the imagination for the sake of information.

This train of thought inspired a poem I wrote called “*The Way Things Are*”, and here are a couple of verses:

*No, the candle is not crying, it cannot feel pain,
Even telescopes, like the rest of us grow bored.
Bubble-gum will not make the hair soft and shiny.
The duller the imagination, the faster the car,
I am your father and this is the way things are.*

*No, the red woolly hat has not been put on the railing
to keep it warm ... Old people do not walk slowly
because they have plenty of time ...
Though lightly worn, a crown may leave a scar,
I am your father and this is the way things are.*

Verse has a vital role to play in developing and nurturing children’s literacy from an early age. We are born into a world of rhythm – from the heartbeat in the womb to the pulses of the seasons, and with a sense of expectancy when we know when a rhyme is coming. Children are open to the instant appeal of language to be found in poetry, and it is adults who are responsible for making them think it is difficult or dull.

In Europe in the thirteenth century, and indeed in many parts of the world, music, poetry and dance were normally one and the same art, and in young children they still are, until poetry becomes something to be read in silence. The Poetry of Shush rather than the Poetry of Share.

I think back to my old days at Star of the Sea junior school near the docks in Liverpool, and what I remember most clearly, despite there being a war on, is colour. The daily excitement of painting, writing, singing, and my first experience of choral verse – “Time=stables” chanted out in unison. The teachers, without exception, were kind, patient and knowledgeable, and when I grew up I wanted to be one of them. (The fact that they were all female, single and middle-aged, of course, might have been problematic had I not left to knuckle down – or rather, be knuckled down – under the Irish Christian Brothers.) And it was there that I mislaid the key. The Brothers were first-class at making us sit up straight and getting us into university, but there was no space in the curriculum for the arts. I say “mislaid” the key, because luckily, I found it some years later, but that’s another story.

Memory, I concede, is selective, but there is no doubt I learned to love the act of writing and drawing very early on, but then lost interest when the emphasis moved away from imagination to information, from creativity to something that was constantly measured and compared. Check your facts, tell it like it is. But what is *it*? Creativity is about imagination, and without imagination, how do we visualise the future?

Could you visualise, for instance, a year without Christmas? What! No carols, Nativity plays, Christmas trees, no family gatherings and festive fun? There are people out there, as you know, rich and powerful people. Who would have it cancelled and replaced with yet another shopping opportunity. Bah, humbug! Did such a dreadful thought inspire another poem? It certainly did, a cautionary tale set in the not too distant future:

Alternative Santa

*"I'm fed up looking like Father Christmas
Muttered Father Christmas one year.
I need a new outfit. I must change with the times,
So, for a start it's goodbye reindeer."*

*He googled "alternative Santas"
And was amazed at the stuff that appeared.
He got rid of the holly-red costume,
Had a haircut, and shaved off his beard.*

*Spent weeks in front of a computer
In a cave hollowed out of the ice.
Wearing a T-shirt emblazoned Happy Holiday
And jeans (Amazon, half-price.)*

*Couldn't wait to straddle his snow-ped
(The bargain he'd bought on eBay):
A rocket-powered silver toboggan,
His supersonic sleigh.*

*Then one morning he thought, "Oh why bother
Delivering presents by hand
When it could all be done online?
Busy parents will understand.*

*We are lucky to live in a digital age
Where the aim is access and speed
SantaNet I'll call the system
Santafaction guaranteed."*

*And that was years and years ago
Now little children hardly know
About Midnight Mass and mistletoe
Christmas carols and candle glow
Sleigh bells ringing across the snow
And Santa singing Yo ho ho.*

*For that was years and years ago
For that was years and years ago.*

I included this verse in *100 Best Christmas Poems for Children*, a bulging stocking of an anthology I edited for SPCK, featuring poems by the likes of T.S. Eliot, Ted Hughes, Ogden Nash, Christina Rossetti and Brian Patten. A diverse collection that I hope will bring cheer to the child in the family and the child in us all. And finally, may I offer not only my greetings for the season but a gentle reminder that before you go to bed at night, you say your prayers, and then your poems, because although I am not your father, This is the Way Things Are.

- Roger McGough has published many books of poems for children and adults. He was a member of the group Scaffold in the 1960s when he contributed poems to *The Mersey Sound*, which sold over a million copies. He presents Poetry Please on BBC Radio 4 and is president of the Poetry Society. His latest collection is *Safety in Numbers* (Viking, £9.99; Tablet price £9). *100 Best Christmas Poems for Children* is published by SPCK at £8.99 (Tablet price £8.09).

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/21061/-poetry-children-and-imagination>

ADVENT REFLECTIONS FOR PEACEMAKERS

A selection of reflections and poems by Pax Christ members offer useful prompts: in his reflection on the Psalms, Paul advocates 'getting real, facing facts'; Kate expresses Advent longing, asking 'When will the fruit on the fig tree ripen?' In the words of Annie O'Connor, to hear God's voice, we need to 'slow down and listen'.

Download from Pax Christi: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/advent-reflections-for-peacemakers/>

THE INJUSTICE ADVENT CALENDAR - 24 DAYS TO CHANGE THE WORLD-

Forget chocolate. Forget beauty samples. Forget beard oil, tiny gin bottles and small portions of cheese...

This is the advent calendar that matters.

For Christmas 2021 we're partnering with a hand-picked selection of world changing organisations to provide you with 24 simple ways to make the world a better place. Every day until Christmas we'll send you an opportunity to stand up for justice in a simple way. Here are the rules... It will always be free. It will always take less than 5 minutes to complete. So you'll be signing petitions, sending short emails, maybe even texting a friend... but you won't be giving any money and you won't be losing hours of your day either.

Sign up here: [https://traidcraftexchange.org/injustice-advent-](https://traidcraftexchange.org/injustice-advent-calendar?utm_source=All+Constituents&utm_campaign=4a39d20993-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_09_12_07&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c18b31d37d-4a39d20993-20756925)

[calendar?utm_source=All+Constituents&utm_campaign=4a39d20993-](https://traidcraftexchange.org/injustice-advent-calendar?utm_source=All+Constituents&utm_campaign=4a39d20993-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_09_12_07&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c18b31d37d-4a39d20993-20756925)

[EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_09_12_07&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c18b31d37d-4a39d20993-20756925](https://traidcraftexchange.org/injustice-advent-calendar?utm_source=All+Constituents&utm_campaign=4a39d20993-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_09_12_07&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c18b31d37d-4a39d20993-20756925)

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH LIVERPOOL PRESS RELEASE

10 December 2021: Liverpool activists call for climate justice and urge Foreign Minister to tell the PM to withdraw from climate-wrecking gas project:

Don Naylor for Liverpool FoE: Today, Friday December 10th, 6pm at Pier Head, we will be joining Liverpool City Region COP26 Coalition for an International Climate Justice Vigil, as G7 Foreign Ministers meet in Liverpool. As part of the vigil, there will be a Mozambique solidarity photo stunt by FoE, featuring "earth-on-fire" masks and a mock gas pipeline. For further information, please e-mail foe.liverpool@gmail.com or call 07983 657859

Members of Liverpool Friends of the Earth will hold a photo action featuring a 'burning' gas pipeline and "earth-on-fire" masks on Liverpool's waterfront this Friday evening, as the G7 foreign and trade minister's summit gets underway. The photo action forms part of a wider international climate justice vigil organised by the Liverpool City Region COP 26 coalition.

Campaigners will call on Foreign Minister Liz Truss to tell the Prime Minister to withdraw UK support for a climate-wrecking gas project in Mozambique, which has been linked to conflict, human rights abuses, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. The action coincides with international Human Rights Day and follows a judicial review of the government's funding of the project that was heard in the High Court in London this week.

Despite telling global onlookers that he is committed to curbing the climate crisis at last month's UN climate talks in Glasgow, the Prime Minister and his government are still pledging over \$1 billion (approx. £850 million) to support the Mozambique liquified natural gas (LNG) project. The development would have severe consequences for the climate and could produce more climate-wrecking pollution over its lifetime than the combined annual gas emissions of all 27 EU countries.

But it's not just the climate that'll be impacted; lives and livelihoods are already being devastated by this project too. This development, along with others in the Cabo Delgado, has exacerbated conflict and militarism in the region, with reports of human rights abuses by the army, such as the killing of local people and extortion and blackmail of families. In 2020, Amnesty International reported more than 2,000 deaths in the region where liquid natural gas is to be processed. Total and ExxonMobil have suspended their operations indefinitely. There is also evidence that energy companies have paid the government to deploy soldiers to protect their interests across the LNG gas fields.

Don Naylor, of Liverpool Friends of the Earth, said: "The Prime Minister says the UK is a global leader in confronting the climate crisis but his government is funding the fire by supporting a gas mega-project in Mozambique which would have a catastrophic impact on our planet, and is perpetuating human rights abuses."

As part of the judicial review that was heard at the High Court this week, Friends of the Earth asked the court to rule that the government's decision to fund the project was unlawful because it is not in line with its climate obligations as set out in the Paris Agreement. However, the government can withdraw funding from the project at any time.

Sarah Davies, also of Liverpool Friends of The Earth, added: "On international Human Rights Day, we're asking Liz Truss to use her position in the Prime Minister's cabinet to urge him to withdraw UK support from this climate-wrecking project. Now would be a good time for the Prime Minister's actions to start matching his words."

"We also want to highlight how important it is to act locally to secure climate justice. It's really concerning that the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority is giving its backing to HyNet, a controversial project involving Italian gas giant Eni, who are heavily involved in a separate Mozambique LNG project."

The group are active campaigners in the Liverpool City Region and focus on both local and international climate issues. Liverpool FoE is a member of the wider LCR COP 26 coalition. To find out more information please call Don Naylor on 07983657859 or email foe.liverpool@gmail.com. ENDS

Notes to editors

1. Further details of the international climate justice vigil organised by the Liverpool City Region COP 26 coalition can be found here <https://www.facebook.com/events/895458504662924/>
 2. Following the action, Liverpool Friends of the Earth will send a letter to the office of Foreign Minister Liz Truss, to be made available on request
 3. Friends of the Earth England, Wales & Northern Ireland is judicially reviewing the government's decision to fund the Mozambique LNG project on the grounds that the project is not compatible with the Paris Agreement, and that the government did not properly assess whether the project was compatible with the Paris Agreement. The hearing was held at the Royal Courts of Justice from Tuesday 7 to Thursday 9 December. The judgement will be given in the New Year.
 4. It has been estimated that the emissions from burning the gas produced by the LNG Mozambique project could add up to 4.5 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent to the atmosphere – the same as the entire annual emissions of all 27 EU countries – see this joint FoE and New Economics Foundation report: <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/tip-iceberg-future-fossil-fuel-extraction>
- Further information on the Mozambique LNG project can be found here: [https://cdn.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Mozambique LNG project FoE briefing August 2021.pdf](https://cdn.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Mozambique_LNG_project_FoE_briefing_August_2021.pdf).
5. The Amnesty 'Mozambique: Civilians killed as war crimes committed by armed group, government forces, and private military contractors – new report' 2 March 2021 can be found here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/mozambique-civilians-killed-as-war-crimes-committed-by-armed-group-government-forces-and-private-military-contractors-new-report/>
 6. Further information about the HyNet project can be found here: <https://lbdaily.co.uk/green-steve-rotherams-hydrogen-buses/>

Friday December 10, 6pm at Pier Head, we will be joining Liverpool City Region COP26 Coalition for an International Climate Justice Vigil, as G7 Foreign Ministers meet in Liverpool. As part of the vigil, there will be a Mozambique solidarity photo stunt by FoE, featuring "earth-on-fire" masks and a mock gas pipeline.

For further information, please e-mail foe.liverpool@gmail.com or call 07983 657859 Don Naylor for Liverpool FoE

FILM INSTALLATION Tate Liverpool EMILY SPEED: FLATLAND Until 5 June 2022

A new film installation by North West based artist Emily Speed. The film is inspired by Edwin Abbott's 1884 novella *Flatland*, a satire of Victorian society, where all existence is limited to two dimensions. In this society men may have any number of sides depending on their status. Women, on the other hand, are thin, straight lines who are at the bottom of the hierarchy. As their pointed ends are considered to be dangerous, they are restricted to separate entrances and must paint one end of their line-body orange as well as swaying continuously to alert others to their presence. A satire of Victorian society and the role of women within it, the book poses provocative questions about perception, reality and metaphysics and has influenced and inspired artists and scientists alike.

Known for her work examining the relationship between the body and architecture, Speed's practice considers how a person is shaped by the buildings they have occupied and how a person occupies their own psychological space. Working in many different media, including sculpture, drawing, performance and film, Speed regularly collaborates with choreographers, dancers and filmmakers and embeds community groups and real-life narratives within her work. Emily Speed was announced as the successful applicant of the inaugural Art North West scheme; an open call issued by our gallery for artists based in the north west of England to submit ideas for a project or exhibition to be shown at Tate Liverpool.

Flatland is centred around a new film installation, which uses set design, choreography, and costume to depict flattened hierarchies within a close-knit community of women. This is accompanied by a second film that focuses on a single performer, signing a text written by author Eley Williams in British Sign Language.

Echoing Abbott's novella, the performers in Speed's film begin line-like and rigid before working together and unfolding to create more colourful, layered and complex shapes through increasingly vibrant movement. This evolution is also realised through costume. The performers wear functional housework garments, such as aprons and tabards that contain hidden elements relating to the set design.

The work can be understood through a mixture of audio and visual components. These include text and on-screen visuals alongside British Sign Language interpretation.

Audio description: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/emily-speed-flatland/exhibition-guide>
https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/emily-speed-flatland?utm_source=emarsys&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CRM_TL_MAA_Nov_w3_2021_Winter_At_TL&src=email_3347191&sc_customer=994796&sc_lid=238876920&sc_uid=OggMTkDR9j&sc_lid=3545&sc_eh=80bc33d031413e6b1

BRUCE KENT: LET US SUPPORT THE AGENDA OF PEACE OF POPE FRANCIS

9 December 2021 **Source: NJPN Blog**

This, thanks to COVID and dreary winter weather, could be a gloomy time for many of us. But for many of us also, and not just Catholics, there is one great shaft of warm sunshine and clear common sense. It comes from Pope Francis, now an 84-year-old. Endlessly active, he clearly does not know what taking time off might mean.

He has recently returned from almost a week in Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean. On the island of Lesbos he met thousands of refugees fleeing from turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa, trapped in a camp and unable to move on with their lives. He gave them hope and encouragement and had so much to say to us about their plight.

"The remote causes" - he mentioned exploitation of the poor, well-financed wars and the arms trade - "should be attacked, not the poor people who pay the consequences and are even used for political propaganda".

He went on to criticise European leaders who want to build a wall to keep immigrants out. So much for the Polish Prime Minister. We in Britain don't need to build a wall. The Channel is wall enough.

Pope Francis has spoken no less forcibly about nuclear weapons. His representative at the UN General Assembly in September 2018, Archbishop Gallagher, made their rejection clear. "The world is not safer with nuclear weapons; it is more dangerous," he said. This just underlines Pope Francis's own words at a meeting in Rome in 2017.

He talked then about "the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of any employment of nuclear devices". He said, "if we take into account the risk of an accidental detonation as a result of error of any kind, the threat of their use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned; for they exist in the service of a mentality of fear that affects not only the parties to the conflict but the entire human race."

Please do not think that I am Pope fixated. But I recognise good sense when I see it. Much of it comes also from other Churches, faiths, and secular social change movements.

By way of balance let me give you a comment from Dr Al-Tikriti, President of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB): "War has today become an industry which benefits the rich and powerful while consuming the impoverished, deprived and marginalised," he said; "it is also incredible that no one mentions the immeasurable devastation that wars and military conflicts inflict on the planet."

Strange, but no accident, that at COP26, the recent UN meeting on Climate Change held in Glasgow, the massive contribution to CO2 output by the world's military hardly got a mention despite all the efforts of peace activists outside the official meeting.

Pope Francis serves the whole world by making sense of the connections between issues that might seem separate: refugees, poverty, war, the arms trade, climate change, the Covid crisis, our indifference to each other and the rest of creation. Perhaps we could join forces behind the Holy Father's 'agenda for peace'? If this inspires you but you're not too sure where to start, put Sunday 16 January 2022 in your diary. That's 'Peace Sunday', and he has given us a rich topic to explore: 'Education, work and dialogue between generations: tools for building lasting peace'. That's something we could all contribute to in our families, parishes, schools, justice and peace groups, and other networks. Let's make connections across generations and get going!

Find ideas and resources here: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2022/>

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/43637>

PEACE SUNDAY 16 JANUARY 2022

It's Peace Sunday again! 16 January is the date, and we hope to regain momentum since last year's observance was so curtailed by Covid. So for 2022 let's push the boat out, out into deeper water, reaching people of all ages through the liturgy and prayer, by sharing the message, and by action for peace.

'Education, work and dialogue between generations: tools for building lasting peace' is the theme announced for the 55th Message for World Peace Day which is promoted with the support of the International Affairs Department of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Pope Francis is inviting us to think of the role of education and upbringing in building lasting peace, and creating solidarity and dialogue between generations as a way of building peace. This provides a golden opportunity for families, schools and groups to explore their role in peacemaking.

TIME TO GET PLANNING! It's a concerted effort. We need the help of every member to get Pax Christi's message out there. Our resources are plentiful, either online, or paper copies can be sent to you.

Which of these suggestions would work in your situation?

- **Personally:** Offer to give a talk at Mass or in another setting — use our script, or the pre-recorded talk. If you use social media share our posts and retweet, adding your personal comment.
- **Families:** Try out our prayer time resource specially prepared for young children. Talk to family members who are less aware of peace issues and find common ground.
- **Parishes:** Talk to your priest about marking Peace
- **Young people:** Give our 'Activities & Prayers' pages to those responsible for children's liturgy at church. In schools pass on the assembly/form-time notes from our Education Worker, Aisling Griffin. Organise an 'Artists for Peace' project, inviting young people to create images, videos, graphics, that illustrate the link between peace and care of creation. Find ideas here: <https://paxchristi.net/2021/10/15/winners-artistsfor-peace/>
- **Groups:** Read or adapt the script to give a short talk and stimulate discussion. Start a cross-generational discussion in your parish, perhaps linked to the Synod preparation, on the links between faith and justice. There are excellent support resources here: <https://millionminutes.org/generations>
- **Fundraising:** Organise a fundraising activity or a parish collection to support Pax Christi. We rely on Peace Sunday donations to help fund our work – and those were down by 75% this past year, making income much more precarious. In the present circumstances we would be doubly grateful for any donation you are able to make towards our work for peace. **Donate to Pax Christi:** <https://paxchristi.org.uk/about-us/support-us/donation/>

You can find all our Peace Sunday information, ideas and resources on our dedicated webpage:

<https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2022/> <https://paxchristi.org.uk/about-us/support-us/donation/>

Resources to download



Peace Sunday Logo

<https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2022-PS-logo.png>

Justpeace with poster and hints on how to promote Peace

<https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Justpeace-with-Peace-Sunday-poster.pdf>

Order form for Peace Sunday materials <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2022-PS-order-form.pdf>

Don't forget that these resources can be used at any time of year. If 16 January is not convenient for your parish or group, hold your own 'Peace Sunday' later on.

<https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2022/>

• **Read NJPN's weekly column** online on Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com or find articles be uploaded onto our website at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk

• Many items taken from the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com an invaluable free resources for up-to-date J&P news, events and in-depth articles.

• **Sign up** for regular news and information from NJPN including a **new fortnightly e-bulletin with a comprehensive round-up of current events, campaigns, e-petitions and resources** (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues for NJPN North West) at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk or contact ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org or admin@justice-and-peace.org 020 7901 4864

The views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of NJPN