

TEXT: PEGGY HEALY GIVES ROMERO WEEK LECTURE

27/03/2023: Peggy Healy gave the following lecture: '**Responding to the Cry of the Poor Today**' for Romero Week, in Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow, Liverpool, Waterloo and Canterbury.

Peggy was a Maryknoll Sister for over 20 years who knew St Romero who was martyred while saying Mass in March 1980, and she was a sister and friend of the four US women martyrs of El Salvador.

Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, and Lay Missioner Jean Donovan, missioned by the Archdiocese of San Salvador, were working in La Libertad and in Chalatenango, El Salvador with refugee victims of the war that had been raging for some time. They were threatened many times by military and paramilitary death squads for the gospel centred humanitarian work they were doing.

On December 2, 1980, nine months after Archbishop Romero was assassinated, the four women were picked up at the airport by the military, raped and murdered, and buried in a shallow grave in a deserted area in the countryside. That war raged on for many years after their deaths, and Peggy lost many other dear friends including the Jesuits who were martyred in El Salvador ten years after the women were murdered. Since living and working in Central America, she has worked as a nurse and later as a lawyer promoting human rights and accompanying excluded and marginalized communities around the world in their struggle for equality and justice and peace.

"Thank you so much to the Romero Trust and to all of the sponsors of this program for inviting me and for all of the extraordinary work that you have been doing for so many years, embracing and raising up St Oscar Romero as a model Christian for our 21st century world.

But mostly, I want to thank each of you for coming today. The fact that you are in the room here today and interested in these Salvadoran martyrs - the fact that you are touched by their message-is oxygen for me - and it is a life-saving energy for the planet. For, as I look around me here today, I am clearly among saints and prophets again, as I have been my whole life. And I hope to be able to share some of that inspiration with you today.

I was fortunate to have 21 years as a Maryknoll Sister. I was missioned to Nicaragua in 1975, five years before my four friends, Maura, Ita, Dorothy, and Jean, were martyred in El Salvador. I lived with Maura Clarke in one of the poorest barrios in Nicaragua from 1975-1977 and I studied Theology for a year with Ita Ford in 1978.

When Maura and Ita both volunteered to go to El Salvador in 1979, I was working at the Washington Office on Latin America, which was a church sponsored human rights organization in Washington DC., and we planned that I would join them in El Salvador the following year. I visited Maura and Ita and Dorothy and Jean several times during 1979 and 1980. And I met Monsignor Romero more than once during that time. It was the Archdiocese that had asked the four women to undertake their life-saving mission among the refugee victims of the civil war that was raging there. I was with Maura and Ita and Dorothy and Jean in El Salvador in late November, 1980, just two weeks before they were martyred. The four of them picked me up at the airport and a few days later dropped me off at the same airport where the military picked them up the night of their martyrdom on December 2, 1980. It was a terrible, terrible time and a terrible, terrible loss. I never got to serve with them in El Salvador but I have gotten to witness the extraordinary impact that their martyrdom has had over these 40 plus years on countless people across the globe.

And the thing that moved me from the beginning--and that still moves me today--more than anything-is not their saintliness nor their holiness-but the profound humanity of Mgr Romero and the four women. Ordinary people living extraordinary lives. I remember clearly when Romero was named in 1977 as Archbishop of San Salvador and we, priests and religious throughout Central America, were all so deeply disappointed. He was, in our eyes, an academic who taught at the seminary, and who had little contact with the poor. We were desperately hoping for a different cleric to be named. But by the time I met Archbishop Romero in 1979, only two years later, he was already deeply revered by the clergy and the people of El Salvador. He had become a larger than life prophet and hero and I will never forget how, in the countryside, you could hear his Sunday sermons from out in the street because every battery-operated radio in the vicinity was tuned into his weekly Sunday sermon from the Cathedral. A larger than life hero - but in fact he was not only somewhat small in physical stature but one of those people who would never ever stand out in a crowd. Never. He was simple. Humble. Present. Listening. But he had the impact of a giant. The impact of a saint.

The four churchwomen martyrs were also deeply human. Maura had a heart bigger than any one I ever knew, but God help you if you criticized the Irish! And Ita was a brilliant writer and editor, who was deeply spiritual, along with being splendidly ironic and irreverent when the situation called for it. Dorothy was unfailingly cheerful and brave amidst the constant violence, but she was very worried about the fact that she would be returning to the US, as her congregational mission tour was soon to be over. And Jean was engaged to be married to a doctor. She had documented way too many bodies tortured and left in the street, and she had agonized many times over leaving El Salvador herself, but she never could leave the refugee children behind.

They were all deeply touched by the courage and resilience and faith of the Salvadoran people but each one of them carried their own fears and insecurities-their deep internal wounds - as we all do - and they each struggled with their own demons. Like St. Romero, the women knew very well that they were in danger - they had received direct threats from the same death squads as Mons Romero, who had been gunned down while saying Mass only months before in March, and they were scared. But they persisted, their commitment endured, and they managed to even have a sense of humour about it. That last time I was praying with Maura and Ita in their tiny home in Chalatenango, the last time I saw them, Ita told me to tell their families they would certainly never attain the glory of being martyrs like Mons. Romero because it was much more likely they would be killed by the 200 pound sacks of rice and beans for the war refugees that were stored in a makeshift attic above their beds, that might very well crash through the floor and crush them.

In short, St Oscar Romero and the women were real and accessible and brave and beautiful human beings who stood by the displaced campesino families and regularly took calculated risks to help and rescue them. And that is why they continue to inspire so many others to greatness-and to hear the cry of the poor, just as they did. But what is the cry of the poor?

The cry of the poor is not some pathetic whining - nor is it poverty pornography where we think of the poor as helpless victims whom we must save. It is the clamour to the heavens of those who are systematically dispossessed, marginalized and oppressed by systems and governments-the excluded and subjugated who cry out to be seen and to be heard and to be accompanied in their legitimate and valiant quest not only for survival and safety, but also for justice and equality.

The term was employed by the official Catholic Church in 1968, the year that I was entering the Maryknoll Sisters, by the Latin American Bishops gathered at Medellin, Colombia, where they pronounced that the Church must make a "preferential option for the poor". The Maryknoll Sisters as a congregation, in their Chapter of 1976, made their commitment to that preferential option, aware of the possible consequence of martyrdom. And St. Romero, early on after he was made Archbishop of San Salvador, made crystal clear his option for the poor when he said: "I am a shepherd who with his people has begun to learn a difficult and beautiful truth. Our Christian faith requires that we submerge ourselves in this world. The world that the church must serve is the world of the poor. The persecution of the church is the result of defending the poor."

But today, WHO are the poor among us? Here in Britain, you know all too well the havoc that the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have wrought on your communities-to say nothing of the growing divide between the super-rich and regular citizens, and the devastation of the environment. OXFAM reports that inflation in the UK has touched double digits, and the recession is expected to last into 2024. The National Health Service is on life support, public transport is rampant with cancellations and strikes, and post-Brexit worker shortages are widespread. Homeowners face soaring mortgage rates, renters are subject to no fault evictions, and millions can't afford to heat their homes. Where 20 pounds sterling might have paid for the electricity for a week before, it now would pay for only a couple of days. Food banks, which barely existed a decade ago, are at breaking point, and 14.5 million people are in poverty-mostly children. "Heat or eat." That is the choice for too many in Britain.

And we have similar economic problems in the USA along with the terrible issue of impeded migration. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have effectively closed our southern border to those who are fleeing violence and persecution and extreme poverty in Latin America and beyond. The number of unaccompanied child migrants is staggering, and the New York Times has just done an exposé of how an estimated two-thirds of those 12-13-14 and 15-year-old migrants are working in meat packing plants, factories, industrial bakeries, and other high-risk jobs, in clear violation of child labour laws. And we have a deep-rooted systemic racism in the US, which Pope Francis has labelled "an intolerable sin against God", a racism embedded in our structures, made only worse by an epidemic of gun violence.

Yet while the situation for the poor in the UK and in the USA is very serious, the global situation is catastrophic.

Inequality between the rich world and the rest of the world has seen the largest rise since World War 2. Since the beginning of the decade, the richest one percent of people have captured almost twice as much wealth as the whole of the rest of humanity put together. (Source: OXFAM)

It is no secret that 10% of the world is living on less than \$2 a day. (Source: Lifewater) Let's think about that. That is 1.7 pounds sterling. Think about what that would be like for you or for me.

Of all the children living in extreme poverty, 75 percent live in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. (Source: World Bank) "1 child in 36 dies in the first month" in Sub-Saharan Africa, "while in the world's high-income countries the ratio is 1 in 333." (Source: UNICEF). Don't just hear the number. Think about losing your own infant under one month old.

It is estimated that the COVID 19 pandemic alone has set progress in reducing global poverty back 3-10 years, with recent data indicating that the setback will be closer to 10 years. (Source: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative)

And the war in Ukraine has only added to the crisis. You have felt the serious effects of the war here in the UK but the global implications are even worse. Just one example: Ukraine and Russia export 30% of the world's wheat and 38 countries are now just one step away from famine. (Source: UNDP)

Perhaps Gabriela Bucher, the Executive Director of OXFAM summarized it most powerfully: "Without immediate radical action, we could be witnessing the most profound collapse of humanity into extreme poverty and suffering in memory. This terrifying prospect is made more sickening by the fact that millions of dollars have been captured by a tiny group of powerful men who have no interest in interrupting this trajectory"

Said simply, and beyond the statistics, the poor and the dispossessed are those who, locally in our communities and globally around the world, harvest our crops, sew our clothing in sweatshops, serve our food in restaurants, clean our streets and our houses and our hospitals and who are kept in poverty by structures that need to be transformed by those of us who hear the cry of the poor.

So as Pope Francis has asked each of us. "What will you do? What will you do?"

Locally there is so much need and so many ways to help. Your Justice and Peace Committees, Pax Christi, and Caritas are all doing great work to address the needs and the issues in your communities. Seek them out. Volunteer. Join in their campaigns.

And globally, you also have extraordinary organizations like CAFOD, SCIAF, Christian Aid and Jesuit Missions, that have been addressing the structural roots of poverty in the poorest areas of the world for decades. We don't hear much about Africa or South Asia in the USA nor do the newspapers here in the UK give you much coverage of the catastrophic global situation. But these organizations know all there is to know. Get informed by them. Tell others about them. Donate generously, even and especially during these days when money is tighter.

And if it is climate change that you feel passionate about, and saving the planet, then there are so many ways to make an environmental difference. But perhaps the most powerful in my mind comes from cosmologist Brian Swimme, a disciple of Teilhard de Chardin, who very wisely counsels-"if you want to protect the planet, cultivate awe". Cultivate awe for the majesty and miraculousness of creation. Cultivate that awe in yourself-in your children-in your schools-in your parishes because, as Swimme says, we will not destroy what we are in awe of.

But perhaps even more importantly than WHAT we can do, is HOW shall we respond to the cry of the poor.

First of all, we need to stay close to the communities of those who suffer, those who are excluded, and those who are deprived of their rights, so that we share their joys and sorrows and challenges and triumphs. The women in Salvador lived where the refugees lived. They lived poorly and simply and made themselves available to serve where needed. Mons Romero frequently visited communities scarred by the war and had lines of campesinos at his door daily. They immersed themselves in these communities. And Pope Francis made the point clearly when he told a group of clergy: "I wish you to be shepherds with 'the smell of the sheep 'on you".

Secondly, we need an attitude of respect and listening-seeing the poor as capable of solving their problems, and not as powerless victims. We often confuse compassion with our need to save the poor and solve all of their problems for them. I learned this in spades in Nicaragua when the barrio residents I lived with organized to get running water and a bus line and a cemetery. I wanted to fix everything for them rather than support them in the longer process of finding solutions. I quickly learned how important it was to participate, to accompany, rather than to lead.

Thirdly, we must recognize that the cry of the poor can provoke anger and rage and fear in those whose interests are threatened including governments, individuals, and special interest groups. Just one tiny example: Sometimes when I travelled to El Salvador, of course I found myself sitting beside Salvadoreans on the plane. During one trip, I was sitting next to a woman who was clearly from the upper class and she told me that she owned several coffee farms. She began to tell me how terrible the situation was in the country and worst of all, she said, was that each Sunday, Archbishop Romero stood up in the pulpit of the Cathedral and ordered the campesinos to cut off the fingers of the rich in order to take back their jewels! And like this woman, it is clear that individuals and governments around the world, including my own and your own, have spread false propaganda and have also responded cruelly to those who preach and work for justice and peace. So, we must be ready to counteract the falsehoods and also be prepared to pay the price for aligning ourselves to the powerless-whatever that might be.

Fourthly, the preferential option for the poor is messy. We need to stay faithful to our strongly held gospel values but we must also keep our hearts open to those who have different beliefs. For example, Mons Romero did not believe ever in the use of violence and never ever preached it, but he also understood how the use of violence differs between those who use it to repress and those who are using it because they see it as the only option left to them to make drastically needed change and he criticized both sides when they used violence excessively in the pursuit of power. Another example: even though our sisters saw clearly that it was the government that was responsible for most of the violence, they cared for war refugees no matter which side they were on. Three months before Ita was martyred, her dear Maryknoll sister companion, Carla Piette, drowned when their jeep overturned in a river flash flood after returning a campesino to his home who was in their parish refugee center—a campesino who, they believed, was perhaps an informer and supporter of the military. But that did not stop them from offering him the help he needed. It cost Carla her life and stole from Ita a beloved friend. Carla, too, is a saint and martyr.

Fifthly, as US civil rights activist Bryan Stevenson so beautifully put it: "we have to stay on the side of love". To feel anger and fear is normal but if our actions are motivated by hatred or revenge, this is not the response of a true Christian or a true human being. We CAN commit to act in ways not shaped by hatred or vengeance. Maura Clarke taught me this lesson in Nicaragua, where we had an amazing youth group. One day, as the Somoza government repression got more and more violent and very close, I said to Maura—"If they kill one of our youths, I swear to you that I will pick up an AK47 and start shooting." And instead of chiding me or lecturing me about how unchristian that would be, she looked at me with unending kindness and simply said to me: "Look how much you love them". And that was such a gift to me - only to receive an even greater gift from her years later. When Maura and the other sisters disappeared in El Salvador and we did not know what had happened to them for two whole days, we were all in agony. And on the day they finally found their bodies in a shallow grave, and we confirmed that they had been murdered, I remember as clear as day - at that very moment - that any anger or revenge that I might have had simply drained out of me completely. And all that was left was a kind of compassion for the men who had raped and murdered them because I had no idea how they would be able to live with what they had done. And I also had the absolutely clear sense that I never wanted anyone to be killed for any reason no matter what. And I completely believe that was my sisters' gift to me too.

And finally, there are some basic things that Mons. Romero and the women martyrs practiced that can help you and me to sustain our response over the long haul.

The most important is that the power of love is forged by adversity and struggle but it is also relentlessly committed to nurturing and caring. Don't be distracted by the things that are ugly and painful and hateful. You can't ignore them, but stay focused on the things that are beautiful and inspiring and energizing. Those are the things that will empower you to do what you need to do in the world. (Bryan Stevenson)

Nurture your spirituality along with your activism: Our faith can give us a strength that others do not have.

Find other saints and prophets to work with. Recognize how you, too, are called to be an inspiration to others.

Keep a sense of humour. Pope Francis prays Merton's prayer for a sense of humour every day!

Recognize that we cannot right all wrongs. We can get addicted to activism if we believe that our only goodness and value comes from what we are doing to save the world. Thank goodness that my saviour complex was just a tad less than my survival instinct when I was working in Central America so I did not completely burn out, but it took me many years to feel at all comfortable when I was not on the "justice treadmill" which was my substitute for worthiness. We need to heal our own inner wounds so that we can be truly present to those who have been wounded and brutalized in so many ways. And if I had more carefully followed the example of the people in my barrio in Nicaragua, I would have imitated their ability to rest and play and celebrate even while they were fenced in by misery and terror and darkness.

In closing I want to say that I have never seen the planet as dark as it is now, in so many ways. I am sure many of you feel the same way. But perhaps weirdly enough, I have never felt so hopeful. And this is not because I do not see what is going on. I do - very clearly. Nor am I hopeful because I am some kind of Pollyanna. It is because I have met people and continue to meet people all over the world who are just like you. People who care and who serve and who love in the midst of all of the darkness. For whatever reason, this is OUR time in history. My time has spanned over seven decades. But I was so fortunate to be given the opportunity, early on in my life, in Central America, to experience the extraordinary joy of living with and learning from some of the most forgotten and dispossessed communities on the planet. It had its share of heartbreak and pain and fear. We lost a sainted archbishop and these four extraordinary women and so many, many more saints and martyrs. But I have carried their inspiration with me since then and I have found so many beautiful and heart-expanding ways to continue to respond to the cry of the poor all over the world.

This kind of inspiration is truly infectious and it is our task now to inoculate our world - to infect our world - with our energy and our love and our commitment. Together we need to bring about a new pandemic of kindness and service and presence and mercy and justice. This call requires courage and persistence and resilience and grit and grace. But our name is legion on this planet! We are everywhere! We have heard the cry of the poor and we have not turned away. And why would we, when we have found so much joy and beauty in responding to that cry. So, let me conclude with the cry of Pope Francis ringing in our ears and in our hearts: "Let us be renewed by God's mercy and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation, and make justice and peace flourish." (Laudato Si).

Thank you so much for inviting me to be among you and to be inspired by you."

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/46840>

LINKS

Watch a recording of the service at St Martin in the Fields: www.facebook.com/stmartininthefields

Report on London Romero service 2023 - Responding to the cry of the poor:

www.indcatholicnews.com/news/46830

Archbishop Romero Trust: www.romerotrusted.org.uk/

TUC President Maria Exall at London Romero Service: www.indcatholicnews.com/news/46831

HOW ETHICAL IS YOUR CHOCOLATE?

28/08/2023 **Anne O'Connor writes:** Thanks to **Fr Rob Esdaile** for a Facebook post which prompted me to look further into the issue of child labour in chocolate production. Rob says: Worth remembering as we approach Holy Week and the secular festival of chocolate bunnies ... Still a current issue 9 years after I posted it. See a report in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/apr/03/cadbury-faces-fresh-accusations-of-child-labour-on-cocoa-farms-in-ghana>

The following information is from the UK charity UNSEEN

UNSEEN provides safehouses and support in the community for survivors of trafficking and modern slavery and also runs the UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline and works with individuals, communities, business, governments, other charities and statutory agencies to stamp out slavery for good: <https://www.unseenuk.org/about-us/>

How ethical is the chocolate we buy in the shops that most of us take for granted? Is there child labour involved? Are farmers paid a fair wage? The Chocolate Scorecard aims to provide the answers. The Scorecard is an annual study of the sourcing policies and practices of the world's main chocolate producers and key retailers, and includes household names such as Cadbury, Mars, Lindt and Ferrero. It's a collaboration of 37 charities, universities, individual researchers and other organisations from all corners of the planet, including Unseen, and is led by our partners Be Slavery Free. For key findings from this year, read the Scorecard press release below.

PRESS RELEASE Embargoed Tuesday 28 March 2023 at 00.01

How ethical is your Easter chocolate? Survey reveals big brands lack of transparency:

- New analysis rates the chocolate industry's record on deforestation and human rights
- Household names boasting about green credentials fail to take part
- Chocolate Scorecard helps the public buy responsibly, revealing good producers and "broken eggs"

Chocolate Scorecard 2023: <https://www.unseenuk.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/03/Chocolate-Scorecard-2023.pdf>

Now in its fourth edition, The Chocolate Scorecard 2023 reveals that some of the world's biggest brands, including Mondelez (Cadbury), Unilever, General Mills, Tesco, Walmart and Whole Foods, have been awarded "broken egg" status for failing to take part in this year's cocoa sustainability survey.

The annual Chocolate Scorecard study is the biggest survey of its kind and rates the sourcing policies and practices of 56 of the world's largest cocoa buyers, including traders, processors, and manufacturers. This year also includes retailers who sell their own-brand chocolate products. Altogether, these companies account for about 95% of global chocolate products, Easter eggs among them, and include giants such as Mars, Lindt, Nestlé, Mondelez, Ferrero and Hershey.

The Scorecard rates companies on their policies and practices across six issue areas: deforestation and climate; traceability; living income; child labour; pesticide use; and agroforestry. They are ranked on a scale from green (leading the industry), to yellow (making good progress), to orange (on the journey but a long way to go), to red (lagging far behind the competition) to black (lacking in transparency and zero participation).

Key findings from Chocolate Scorecard 2023:

- Companies which have previously boasted about their sustainability credentials – such as Unilever, General Mills and Mondelez (Cadbury), failed to provide any information, earning them a “broken egg.”
- Less than half of surveyed companies have a policy which includes clear expectations for improvement plans for suppliers, including the possibility of exclusion for continued non-compliance
- 91% of companies responding have a ‘no-deforestation’ policy requiring their suppliers to ensure their cocoa is sourced from areas which does not destroy the forest canopy
- Brands awarded with a “green egg” on sustainability include Tony’s Chocolonely, Alter Eco, Beyond Good, HALBA and Original Beans
- Several of the world’s largest chocolate makers, including Nestlé, MarsWrigley, and Hershey, have continued to improve on their scores from last year, each earning a “yellow egg.”
- On the opposite end of the spectrum, Kellogg’s scored red
- Newcomer Starbucks has shown its willingness to be transparent, beginning its sustainability journey scoring ‘orange.’ Former ‘broken egg’ Godiva continues to show improvement with an ‘orange’ score

Fuzz Kitto, Director of Be Slavery Free, the co-ordinating NGO of The Chocolate Scorecard said:

“On a recent visit to Cote D’Ivoire near the border with Liberia, I was standing in an area close to a national forest, which is protected by law. But the bulldozers were still running, clearing pristine forest to make way for cocoa plantations.”

“The bulldozers won’t stop until business and governments deal with the root causes: a lack of traceability and transparency in supply chains and of a living income for farmers. Deforestation, child labour and pesticide use are all symptoms of the two fundamental issues.”

West Africa produces three-quarters of the world’s cocoa, with Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana being the largest producers. These two countries have lost most of their forest cover in the past 60 years – around 94% and 80% respectively, with approximately one third of forest-loss for cocoa growing.

In 2018, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana also had the highest rise in primary forest loss of any tropical country. In 2020, another 47,000 ha of forest was lost in cocoa growing areas of Côte d’Ivoire. This impacts biodiversity destroying much of the natural habitat of great apes, gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobo.

Best scoring companies in addressing deforestation are Original Beans, Tony's Chocolonely, Beyond Good, Halba, Ferrero, Nestlé, and Mars, who are in the 'green' or top-scoring category. These companies are also leading the way in tackling child and forced labour in their supply chains, alongside Alter Eco, Whittaker’s, Hershey and Ben & Jerry’s – despite the latter’s parent company, Unilever, refusing to take part and claiming to be deforestation free in its cocoa supply chain by 2023.

Dr Julian Oram, Senior Director, Africa, at Mighty Earth said:

“The grim reality is that around 40% of cocoa remains untraceable with beans from deforested land still entering global supply chains. Companies are sitting on information that could shed light onto these ‘dark’ chocolate origins.”

“Some of the biggest brands including Starbucks, Lindt, Godiva and Kellogg's have scored badly for tackling deforestation and climate. We know they can do better and will be encouraging them to do so. Others such as Mondelez, Unilever and Tesco have stayed silent and refused to take part this year, which begs the question: What are they hiding?”

Andrew Wallis OBE, CEO at anti-slavery charity Unseen, said:

“Child labour and modern slavery are part of the cocoa industry and present in the chocolate we buy. This year’s Scorecard shows that of the 56 companies taking part, only nine achieved the best rating for addressing child and forced labour in their supply chains. We hope consumers use this information to buy ethical chocolate free of human rights’ abuses.”

Ends

Notes to editors: The Chocolate Scorecard is a collaboration between 37 NGOs and universities around the world.

LINKS

<https://www.unseenuk.org/press-releases/easter-chocolate-survey-2023//>

<https://www.unseenuk.org/how-ethical-is-your-chocolate/>

<https://www.beslaveryfree.com/>

<https://www.mightyearth.org/>

RECOGNIZING THE GIFTS OF THE POOR

I am deeply convinced that we can only work for the liberation of the people if we love them deeply.

And we can only love them deeply when we recognize their gift to us.

I am deeply convinced of the importance of social change and of the necessity to work hard to bring about a just and peaceful society. But I also feel that this task can only be done in a spirit of gratitude and joy. That is why I am more and more convinced of the importance to live in the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

Christ is the God who entered into solidarity with our struggles and became truly a God-with-us. It was this solidarity that led him to the cross by which he overcame death and evil. Believing in the Risen Lord means believing that in and through Christ the evil one has been overcome and that death no longer is the final word.

Working for social change, to me, means to make visible in time and place that which has already been accomplished in principle by God himself. This makes it possible to struggle for a better world not out of frustration, resentment, anger, or self-righteousness, but out of care, love, forgiveness, and gratitude.

Henri Nouwen

LIFE ON THE BREADLINE UPDATE

Stephanie Denning 27/03/2023

Our ESRC funded Life on the Breadline research officially ended in September 2021 but the team remain busy engaging with Church responses to poverty and beyond. Here are some updates and new resources:

1. New article *'Politics, Poverty and the Church in an "Age of Austerity"'*

Chris Shannahan and Stephanie Denning have published a new open access article in the journal 'Religions'. The article represents the first fieldwork-led analysis of the multidimensional nature of austerity-age poverty by academic theologians in the UK.

The article analyses the impact that austerity has had on Christian responses to poverty and inequality in the UK. We draw on our six ethnographic case studies and interview responses from over 120 national and regional Church leaders to exemplify the four approaches to the Christian engagement with poverty that we identified during our research: 'caring', 'campaigning and advocacy', 'enterprise' and 'community building'.

We argue that the Church needs to grasp the systemic, multidimensional and violent nature of poverty in order to realise the potential embedded in its extensive social capital and fulfil its goal of 'transforming structural injustice'. The paper shows that the Church remains nervous of moving beyond welfare-based responses to poverty and suggests that none of the existing approaches can force poverty into retreat until the Church re-imagines itself as a liberative movement that embodies God's preferential option for the poor in every aspect of its life and practice.

Click here to read the article in full: <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/1/59>

2. Life on the Breadline's Report for Church Leaders

Have you seen the Life on the Breadline Report for Church Leaders?

Coming directly from the findings of our three years of research with national, regional and local Churches in the UK responding to poverty in the context of austerity, the report gives key recommendations for Theology and Mission, Local Church Life, and Christian Social Action and Anti-Poverty Activism.

Read the report here: <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Life-on-the-Breadline-Church-Leaders-Report-2022.pdf>

3. Sign up to the blog for Stephanie's new research into rural hidden hardship

Life on the Breadline researcher Stephanie Denning is undertaking a new piece of research into rural hidden hardship. Funded by the British Academy, the project aims to understand the experiences of people in hardship in the rural North Cotswolds. Using participatory research with local people, it seeks to understand people's hardship journeys, barriers to well-being, and coping mechanisms.

Visit the project website to find out more: <https://hiddenhardship.coventry.ac.uk>

Sign up to the blog here for project updates, reflections, and resources in the next 12 months:

<https://hiddenhardship.coventry.ac.uk/index.php/blog/>

<https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/>

THE VOCATION OF A PEACEMAKER BY JIM FOREST

27/03/2023 **the Orthodox Peace Fellowship**: An extract from a talk given by Jim at St Tikhon's Monastery in June 2003. The talk was later edited by Jim into the essay "The History and Mission of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship," available on our website: <https://incommunion.org/the-history-and-mission-of-the-orthodox-peace-fellowship/>. This extract presents Jim's conclusion.

"Before closing, let me add a few points that describe my own sense of our vocation as Orthodox peacemakers:

We are faithful sons and daughters of the Church, not the Church's rescue committee. Fr. John Meyendorff once remarked about a schismatic Orthodox group, "We do not save the Church. The Church saves us." Our modest task is not to invent anything or announce a new theology or reorganize the Church but simply to reopen forgotten or neglected Church teachings regarding day-to-day life in a world in which enmity is always a problem, in which millions suffer from hunger, thirst and homelessness, and in which war is rarely if ever not occurring somewhere on our small planet.

The Church has preserved the Liturgy down through the centuries. It has preserved the Bible and the Creed. It has preserved the writings of the Church Fathers and the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. It has developed and maintained a calendar of sacred time. But it has been somewhat less attentive to calling us to account for the teaching it has preserved. Over the centuries we have to often been more obedient citizens than obedient Christians.

We believe in a hierarchy of identities. We are not first people of a certain country, then Orthodox, then finally Christians. It is the other way around. We are first Christians, then Orthodox, and finally people of a particular nation. We renounce none of these identities nor do we ignore any of their obligations, but when the requirements of one identity clash with another, we are required to know which comes first.

We try to remind ourselves and our neighbours that there is no such things as a good or holy war -- that it defames God and the Gospel to use adjectives associated with sanctity and heaven in that most hellish of all activities, the organized killing of human beings and the destruction of the environment upon which all life depends. Every possible effort must be made to avoid war, but not by cowardly avoidance or failure to recognize evil for what it is and to resist it. Chamberlain was not a peacemaker. Those who fail to see and resist evil are its accomplices. Yet we believe that prayer and fasting are also weapons of struggle, that there is such a thing as spiritual combat, and that what we seek is not the killing of evil people -- such a task would require a holocaust that would destroy the human race -- but their conversion, which is also our conversion, for the line dividing good from evil runs not between people or classes but, as Solzhenitsyn reminds us, within each and every human heart.

We are people attempting, with God's help, to love our enemies as Christ commands his followers to do. This is not a sentimental undertaking but a soul-saving quest to be liberated from enmity. In the seventh century, St. Maximus the Confessor put it in these words:

"'But I say to you,' the Lord says, 'love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you.' Why did he command these things? So that he might free you from hatred, sadness, anger and grudges, and might grant you the greatest possession of all, perfect love, which is impossible to possess except by the one who loves all equally in imitation of God."

Our concern about the sanctity of human life is not limited to war. We seek to protect the lives of the unborn -- not by denouncing women who feel they have no other choice, but to help them bring their children safely into this world and to do whatever is in our power to make the world more welcoming. With the same motives, we do not regard killing as an acceptable solution for those whose illnesses seem to be incurable or who are severely handicapped. We do whatever we can in support of hospices for the dying, including effective pain relief for those who are suffering. At the same time we oppose taking extraordinary measures to prolong life when in the natural order a person is beyond hope of recovery.

Our view of peace is not borrowed from secular ideologies or political movements. It is not based on the life of Gandhi or Martin Luther King or any of the heroes of nonviolence, even though we greatly admire such people and learn from them. It comes from the Gospel. We understand peace both through the words of Jesus and through his actions. We experience peace in the Liturgy and the eucharistic mystery and try to bring it with us when we return to ordinary life. Day by day we discover peace as the mystery of healing -- healing within ourselves, healing between each other -- the healing that comes from forgiveness, repentance and love.

Peacemaking is not an idea or principle. It is how we live. It is Christ's life in us. It is less a refusal to do terrible things to others than doing those things which communicate the love and mercy of God.

You have heard it again and again but let us never stop remembering what Jesus teaches us about the Last Judgement: What we do to the least person we do to him. May God preserve us from harming the least person. May God give us the love which empowers us to be merciful to the least person.

Peacemakers are everywhere -- the parent sorting out a dispute within his or her family, the parish council member finding a solution to a conflict that might tear a parish to shreds, the priest hearing confessions who helps a penitent experience God's mercy, the missionary who helps awaken faith in another and points the way to baptism, the volunteer who lives a life of hospitality in a neighbourhood others avoid, the driver who responds to dangerous actions on the highway with a prayer rather than a gesture of hatred... We could spend the rest of our lives noting acts of peacemaking.

Last but not least, our fellowship exists to give witness that peacemaking is something absolutely ordinary. It is an integral part of everyday life. It has to do with how we pray, for whom we pray, how we listen, how we speak, what we do with our anger and frustration, our willingness to forgive, and our attempts to serve as a bridge between those who hate each other.

May God give us strength to persevere in being channels of his mercy."

<https://incommunion.org/2023/03/27/the-vocation-of-a-peacemaker-by-jim-forest/>

LINKS

The Orthodox Peace Fellowship: <https://incommunion.org/about-the-opf/>

You can read a short biography of Jim here: <https://incommunion.org/2004/10/14/jim-forest-bio/>

and an autobiographical essay by Jim here: <https://incommunion.org/2004/10/14/getting-from-there-to-here/>

THE BIG ONE' - HUGE CLIMATE PROTEST PLANNED AT PARLIAMENT

Source: Green Christian 26/03/2023

Green Christian is joining forces with many other charities in supporting 'The Big One' climate protest, with a Christian service and pilgrimage to Westminster on Friday 21 April.

Green Christian and Christian Climate Action are, "taking a stand against fossil fuel company greed and government inaction - which is fuelling both the cost-of-living crisis and the climate crisis."

The family-friendly protest continues over the weekend 21-24 April, ending at 6pm each day. Christian Climate Action is holding a prayer vigil throughout and organising different activities for public worship.

The protest will be as inclusive as possible, with churches, small groups, families, friendship groups, knitting circles and more. Many charities and organisations are involved, including CAFOD, Tearfund, Christian Aid, Young Christian Climate Network, Student Christian Movement, Operation Noah, A Rocha UK, Columban Justice Peace and Ecology, and the Iona Community.

Green Christian says: "The science is clear - the head of the UN said recently we are 'firmly on track towards an unliveable world'. The International Energy Agency has said there can be no new oil and gas development, yet our government is opening new oil, gas, and even coal mines. As Christians it is our job to care about this, to be prophetic, to call out our government's flagrant dereliction of duty and to demand action."

Christian Climate Action has been offered a number of church hall floors that people can sleep on for the event. And it has produced a prayer booklet for use before and during 'The Big One'. A service sheet for 21 April is available on the Green Christian website. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12tMTogUcjbwDCXQVCzVixnjGZ53uRjFn/view>

Download prayers: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DsWNLbnsNs6TPF-TupYXZOVFUuLJORKp/view>

From 11am - Gathering at St John's Waterloo for Music and Worship

12 noon - Christian service 1pm - Pilgrimage to Parliament Square

2pm - Prayers for the UK government and blessing on the protest at Westminster.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/46832>

LINKS

Green Christian: <https://greenchristian.org.uk/the-big-one/>

Christian Climate Action: <https://christianclimateaction.org/2022/10/22/the-big-one/>

BISHOP JOHN ARNOLD: CAFOD EMBODIES OUR COMMON HOME

Source: CAFOD 23/03/2023

Bishop John Arnold, Bishop of Salford writes: I have had the honour of being the Chair of CAFOD for 13 years. I will be standing aside from Easter, as Bishop Stephen Wright will take over as Chair of this remarkable charity.

As I approach the end of my time at CAFOD, I have been reflecting on what has most impressed me during my time as a trustee. The words and memories that keep coming to mind is the sense of compassion and our collective care for our common home.

I have been privileged to travel all over the world with CAFOD, seeing first-hand their remarkable work, and meeting such impressive people who work every day to change their lives and the life of their communities.

A memory that sticks strongly in my mind is from 2013, when I visited the Philippines in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan. The devastation I saw was utterly shocking. Hardly any building remained standing without significant damage, whole communities had been lost.

At first, I felt that the damage was too severe for rebuilding. But then I spoke to the local people, the ones who had seemingly lost everything. They greeted me with positivity. They had a plan. They had hope and a steely determination to rebuild.

I thought, "how do you do that in the face of losing everything". It suddenly became so obvious; their sense of solidarity was shining through. It was extraordinary, the people had a real sense of agency, of ownership of their lives, despite the apparent desperation of their situation.

The reason for their determination was because they were all in it together; the children, parents, grandparents all doing their bit to rebuild their lives. They were all working as one to rebuild and doing so with smiles on their faces and hope in their hearts.

Many people have become cynical about faith and how we relate to each other, creating a feeling that we are all increasingly alone. But seeing how the people responded to this crisis encapsulated everything about faith, and the qualities of CAFOD. People do still love their neighbour and are wonderfully generous to each other, even in the face of utter devastation.

This is what makes CAFOD so special to me. Solidarity never seems like an abstract concept or value, but something CAFOD, with their generous supporters and the communities with whom they work, are proud to live and embrace day in and day out.

It is an embodiment of Pope Francis' vision of human solidarity. The Holy Father tells us that: "Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community."

I see this sense of human solidarity, this sense of community with our sisters and brothers, every time CAFOD launches an appeal or raises the plight of injustice around the world.

Even when things are as tough as they are here at home, ordinary Catholics up and down the country do whatever they can to help. Their generosity is expressed each and every time there is need, and even when the disasters they are tackling are not on our television screens or in our newspapers.

Their generosity is expressed in various ways. They donate money, give time in speaking at Mass, attend campaigning rallies or just by including those in need in their prayers. People will show the most extraordinary generosity to their sisters and brothers in need.

This seems to me to be a clear expression of our Catholic values of solidarity and our care for our common home. And it has being the privilege to have seen these values enacted that has made me so proud to be a part of CAFOD.

So, even though I will no longer be formally a part of CAFOD's administration, I will remain a lifelong friend and supporter and will keep our sisters and brothers in need, CAFOD's supporters, and all those who work with CAFOD, in my prayers.

Bishop John Arnold has been a CAFOD trustee for 14 years and Chair of its Board for 13 years. From Easter 2023, Bishop Stephen Wright will replace him as CAFOD's Chair. <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/46813>

CAFOD ANNOUNCES NEW CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

Patrick Kinsella 23/03/2023

The official aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales has announced Bishop Stephen Wright as its new chair. Bishop Stephen is an Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham and has served as a member of the CAFOD board since February 2021. His tenure will begin from Easter 2023. He has been a long supporter of CAFOD, helping to raise awareness of the charity in his diocese and just last year raised over £1,600 as part of the Walk against Hunger challenge.

Bishop Stephen will replace long-serving Chair, Bishop John Arnold, the Bishop for the diocese of Salford who is standing down after serving CAFOD as its chair for 13 years.

Commenting on the change in chair, Christine Allen, CAFOD's director said: "I am delighted to welcome Bishop Stephen as our new chair, he has already been an invaluable member of our board since he joined last year and I look forward to working closely with him in the coming years.

"But it is also a great sadness to say goodbye to Bishop John, who has served us tremendously well for over a decade. We feel honoured to have so many bishops who are supportive of our work and I know Bishop John will continue to be a lifelong friend of CAFOD and the people we serve."

A celebratory Mass took place on 23 March to welcome Bishop Stephen as chair, as well as offering a chance for CAFOD's staff and supporters an opportunity to say goodbye to Bishop John.

Bishop Stephen, spoke of his new role: "It is a privilege to be following in the footsteps of Bishop John, who has been a tireless champion for CAFOD over the years. He has steered the organisation remarkably well, standing in solidarity with the poorest communities around the world.

"I look forward to doing the same, working alongside our talented and committed trustees, employees, partners, volunteers, and supporters.

"Pope Francis' call to care for our common home lies at the heart of CAFOD's work. Our Catholic Christian mission is to serve our sisters and brothers throughout the world who are in need, recognising this can only be achieved by caring for the environment too. May the Lord continue to bless this work."

Over the course of his tenure with CAFOD, Bishop John Arnold travelled around the world to see the work of CAFOD first-hand. As part of these trips, Bishop John shared his diaries about the visits online for CAFOD supporters, which proved very popular.

Bishop John Arnold, commenting on his tenure as chair said: "It has been a privilege to serve CAFOD for 13 years as its chair. I will never forget the people I have met all over the world, from Niger to Cambodia, and getting to see how the extraordinary work of CAFOD and its partners is making a real difference to lives.

"It was through working with CAFOD, seeing the damage inflicted on the poorest communities by the ecological crisis, that I felt compelled to act and set my Diocese of Salford on the path to achieve net zero by 2038. I will remain a committed friend of CAFOD and I wish Bishop Stephen all the best as he takes on this rewarding and exciting role."

Bishop Thomas Neylon, an Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool, will also be joining the CAFOD board of trustees. On joining the board, Bishop Tom said: "I've long admired the work of CAFOD, not just the work overseas but also the role it plays in inspiring Catholic communities up and down the country to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world. I look forward to working closely with Christine and all of CAFOD to continue this vital work."

CAFOD works in over 40 countries around the world, and its local experts help some of the hardest to reach people in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. While grounded in the Catholic faith, CAFOD helps people of all faiths and none. But its links with the global church means the organisation can reach people many others can't.

Other changes to the board include John Darley and Dr John Guy OBE coming to the end of their tenure. Further changes to the Board will be announced in due course.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/46812>

Read more about CAFOD here: <https://cafod.org.uk/>

NJPN ANNUAL CONFERENCE TO FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Ellen Teague 2/02/2023

The National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) has announced that its annual conference will take the theme: '*Sustainability? Survival or Shutdown*'. Scheduled for 21-23 July in Derbyshire it will address issues crucial to the common good and the well-being of all creation, with a particular focus on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Echoing the words of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* that all issues are interconnected, as well as environment and especially the impact of climate change, we must consider the need for just and peaceful conflict resolution, economic justice, and stability.

The Diocese of Westminster Justice and Peace Commission, CAFOD, Christians Aware and the Columban team for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation are on the organising group. Children and young people are welcome and have their own parallel programmes.

Last Saturday's online meeting of the NJPN looked at '*Cost of Living Crisis - Living or Existing*'. Cardiff Diocese was among the dioceses responding locally with a fuel poverty campaign. Other dioceses represented included Arundel and Brighton, Birmingham, Brentwood, Cardiff, Clifton, Nottingham, Southwark and Westminster. Other groups present included Mill Hill Missionaries, Christians Aware, Catholic Association for Racial Justice and Pax Christi, who introduced their new Executive Director Andrew Jackson.

Detailed reports were heard from Hexham and Newcastle. Fr Chris Hughes, a priest of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese and active with Tyne and Wear Citizens, talked of the "current crisis", particularly the issue of in-work poverty. "We need to be attentive to the realities of people's lives," he said. The North-East has the highest levels of poverty in the country and around two-thirds of working-age adults in poverty live in a household where at least one adult is in work. He felt that paying the Living Wage is vital and called for every diocese and Catholic institution to do this, including payment to contractors. He said, "out of 22 dioceses of England and Wales, only four are accredited Living Wage employers - Westminster, Brentwood, Birmingham and Hexham & Newcastle - and we want more accredited Living Wage employers in our dioceses." He noted that most dioceses now have policies on the environment, but not on social justice and urged that a policy be developed and priority given to the Living Wage initiative.

Sara Bryson, Senior Community Organiser of Tyne and Wear Citizens, also deplored "wages being stagnant for a decade." She felt, "social mobility is non-existent; it's very hard to work your way out of poverty." She highlighted that 47% of under-fives live in poverty and felt a response "should be more than setting up warm hubs." She said: "let's focus more on Justice rather than Charity and let's get back to fighting the injustice rather than the charitable responses." Sara described it as "wonderful" to work with Hexham and Newcastle Diocese on various campaigns. The 'JUST CHANGE' campaign, for example, has helped pupils receiving Free School Meals to access unspent money, which can now be rolled over. The United Reformed Church is looking into whether churches could provide interest-free credit which might address the huge problem of families heavily in debt.

NJPN Chair Paul Southgate asked: "can we find champions of the Living Wage in our dioceses?" and "can we lobby our dioceses to have a policy on social justice?" NJPN supports the Living Wage Campaign.

Another speaker was Nalini Nathan of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice and General Secretary of the Conference of Religious, who gave a presentation, '*Ethnic minorities struggling to survive*'. She highlighted that: "for ethnic minorities, the cost of living crisis might be considered as an equal added burden, in addition to unequal burdens." She reported that, 35.7% of ethnic minorities are likely to live in poverty compared with 17.2% of white people. Families from ethnic minorities are more likely to be homeless. She asked: What have you seen or heard in recent years about the UK government helping to reduce the poverty gap for ethnic minorities? What can you do to help change things?

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/46660>

LINKS

Booking for NJPN Conference 21-23 July 2023: www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/

● Read the SPRING issue of *MOUTHPEACE* the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses <https://jpschrewsbury.files.wordpress.com/2023/02/mouthpeace-spring-2023.pdf>

DIARY MARCH

29 Liverpool Archdiocese Networking and information session for volunteers & staff in asylum work at 18.30 (see p.9) Register here: https://Archdiocese_network_4_vols_staff_supporting_refugees.eventbrite.com

APRIL

14 Climate Justice Evening St. Mary's Centre, Handbridge, 7-9pm. Organised by Helen Pritchard, the representative at St Mary's and now a member of the Chester Christian Aid Group, with help from Katy Rowe and a CA staff member. Dr Richard Baker, an expert on climate science and climate justice and a Christian Aid volunteer speaker, will give a talk, followed by a group discussion. Refreshments provided. Christian Aid has been campaigning with others for some time on the issue of climate justice, and with some success - though it remains to be seen whether all the funds pledged by the richer countries at the recent COP27 meeting will be handed over to those poorer countries so hard hit by climate change.

20 Earth Day <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2023/>

22 'Earth Day Sustainability Fair' at The Carriage Shed, City Place, City Road, Chester CH1 3DR (next to Chester railway station). The theme for Earth Day 2023 is *Invest in our Planet*. For the first time, to celebrate Earth Day 2023, Eco Communities are working with Small Streets Market, bringing lots of stalls to buy sustainably and locally, as well as finding out more information on sustainable living and local projects.

21-24 THE BIG ONE Christian Climate Action protest <https://christianclimateaction.org/2022/10/22/the-big-one/>

23 Climate Crisis Event Marple Hall School Hill Top Drive Hilltop Drive, Marple Stockport, SK6 6LB 1-5 pm. Key note speaker Dr Amanda Maycock (Associate Professor in Climate Dynamics) from the Priestly International Centre for Climate Leeds University. Also Nick Leslie from Stockport Council Climate Action Group ...Jonathan Atkinson from The Carbon COOP on retrofitting homes. Presentations from local school pupils ... Panel of CAM members answer our questions Plus stalls and art and writing competitions for school children. More details from marian37et@gmail.com

26 U N Chernobyl Day <https://www.un.org/en/observances/chernobyl-remembrance-day>

MAY

9 Chester World Development Forum AGM, 7pm at The Unity Centre, Chester. Steve Hughes, the Chair of Chester Sustainability Forum, will give us an overview of the initiatives, campaigns and events currently happening or being developed by members of CSF.

- 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.uk 020 7901 4864

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