

NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin October 2023

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

URGENT ACTION

SAFE PASSAGE 5 October 2023

This Government has made a chilling choice to put politics before humanity, reducing refugees to mere statistics, small boats and administrative backlogs. Just yesterday, Suella Braverman further fanned the flames of harmful anti-refugee rhetoric. She warned of a “hurricane” to come, suggesting that millions of people could arrive on our shores, “uncontrolled and unmanageable”. This fear-mongering tactic, pitting people against one another, is an age-old strategy.



It only distracts attention from the truth: that deterrence politics simply do not work. This week, we launched our Routes To Safety campaign to show that another way is possible. <https://www.safepassage.org.uk/routes-to-safety>

The only hurricane we're seeing here is a whirlwind of baseless claims, and of cruel and unworkable measures that punish refugees for simply trying to seek safety in the UK. We know this Government's tactics have failed. Enough is enough.

Please add your name to our Routes To Safety campaign – it only takes 30 seconds
<https://www.safepassage.org.uk/routes-to-safety-add-your-name>

Let's make safety a right for all – not a luxury. As always, thank you for your support.

In solidarity,

Gunes, Head of Campaigns

OPINION

5 October 2023 Anne O'Connor writes: Home Secretary Suella Braverman's recent outbursts horrify me. Hot on the heels of her hardline speech to the rightwing American Enterprise Institute think tank in Washington on 26 September in which she claimed that women and gay people must face more than discrimination if they are to qualify as a refugee – a statement that has been challenged by refugee charities – in her keynote speech at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester on Tuesday she warned that a 'hurricane' of immigrants was on the way.

This scare-mongering rhetoric has alarming echoes of Enoch Powell's inflammatory “rivers of blood” speech on 20 April 1968 to a meeting of the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham. The speech caused a political storm, making Powell one of the most talked about and divisive politicians in the country; it led to his controversial dismissal from the Shadow Cabinet by Conservative Party Leader Edward Heath. According to most accounts, the popularity of Powell's perspective on immigration may have been a decisive factor in the Conservatives' surprise victory in the 1970 general election.

At the time of writing Braverman remains in post as Home Secretary, without doubt the most divisive holder of high office in recent times. She has rapidly become the darling of the right wing of the Tory party and makes no attempt to conceal her leadership ambitions should Rishi Sunak lose the next election.

In the Washington speech Braverman claimed that courts had expanded the convention's definition of “persecution” and increased the number of people qualifying for refugee protection. She asked world leaders to consider whether the UN Refugee Convention was “fit for the modern age”, in a speech that queried the treaty that has underpinned international humanitarian law for seven decades.

The UN's refugee agency UNHCR issued a highly unusual statement on Tuesday defending the 1951 refugee convention and highlighting the UK's record asylum claim backlog. Large numbers of the people seeking asylum in the UK under the current rules have a legitimate claim. According to government figures, 70 per cent were granted some form of refugee protection in the initial decision in the year to June 2023. Experimental statistics released last month showed that only 2 per cent of asylum claims lodged in the UK in 2022 cited discrimination on the grounds of lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation as a factor.

Read more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/sep/26/un-suella-braverman-refugee-convention-unhcr-migration>

HOME SECRETARY TO MAKE AN ATTACK ON THE PRINCIPLES OF THE UN REFUGEE CONVENTION

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE STATEMENT 26 September 2023

The Home Secretary is due to speak to the American Enterprise Institute today and has trailed in advance that she intends to make a wide-ranging attack on the principles on which the UN Refugee Convention was built. Sarah Teather, JRS UK Director, said in response to reports of the contents of the Home Secretary's speech:

"The Refugee Convention is a vital and core mechanism to protect people fleeing persecution, and it is badly needed, now as much and more than ever. To suggest that many of those to whom it has extended protection for decades should be shut out and cast back into danger is appalling. The government should work to extend protection to those who need it, not to find new ways to deny sanctuary. These comments from the Home Secretary are the latest in a cruel, vaunting attack on refugees.

"Indeed, one is left to wonder who the Home Secretary is trying to court with this international speech? Is her focus political and aimed at her own party? If so, she is recklessly giving comfort to dictators and tyrannical regimes on the world stage for vain purpose. Her attack on LGBTQI+ community is particularly concerning given the scale of oppression worldwide.

"In his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which we marked at the weekend, Pope Francis renewed his call for the practice of 'good politics – one that is transparent, honest, farsighted and at the service of all, especially those most vulnerable'; these actions from the Home Secretary today are anything but.

"Where people are forcibly displaced from their homes, we have a human duty to work together to seek solutions. Trying to draw others into a coordinated attack on those in need is a new low."

<https://www.jrsuk.net/news/jrs-responds-to-the-reports-of-the-contents-of-the-home-secretarys-speech-to-the-american-enterprise-institute-later-today/>

Read also: SUELLA BRAVERMAN 'TURNED DOWN MEETING WITH JUSTIN WELBY TO DISCUSS IMMIGRATION'

Suella Braverman has avoided meeting the Archbishop of Canterbury over his concerns about her stance on immigration. A spokesman for the archbishop confirmed the approach to The House, Parliament's magazine. He said: "The archbishop would be happy to meet the Home Secretary to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern. "In the past, the archbishop has met other home secretaries. It is not unusual."

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/suella-braverman-immigration-speech-archbishop-justin-welby-canterbury-b1110471.html>

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

HIGHLIGHTING A PROLIFIC BLACK ACTOR IN EARLY BRITISH CINEMA

Obscurity of Lucius Blake emblematic of erasure of minorities from early British film history, says researcher.

The black British actor, Lucius Blake, only has two official credits to his name on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) film database. An internet search brings up next to nothing about his life. But he actually appeared in at least thirty films from 1928 to 1952. His life and works have been unearthed by a film researcher, Marc David Jacobs, who thinks Blake might be the most prolific black actor in early British cinema.

"At first, I remember sending pictures of him in four films that I had found to my friends and saying 'have you seen this person in other films?' A year later and now I've uncovered him in over 30 films. He's had this 25 year career. He's this great survivor in the background of British cinema from the twenties until the fifties."

Jacobs adds: "One of its many perceived wisdoms is that it was a time when those both in front of and behind the cameras were uniformly white men. But, as a mixed-race person myself, I'm keenly aware that actors and creatives of colour have been present throughout practically the entire history of British film-making – as indeed were women, as well as members of other marginalised communities."

FIND OUT MORE

Newshour - Uncredited black actor may have been most prolific in early British cinema - BBC Sounds

Listen here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gjdvvb>

Read an interview with Marc Jacobs discussing other early British actors and film-makers of colour whose contributions have been overlooked: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/02/overlooked-black-actor-may-have-been-most-prolific-in-early-british-cinema?CMP=share_btn_tw&s=08

EXPERIENCES OF THE WINDRUSH GENERATION

Ann Farr 25 September 2023: The National Justice and Peace Network, meeting in Birmingham on Saturday, heard Rev Canon Eve Pitts, the first black woman vicar in the Church of England and long-standing campaigner for racial justice, speak on the experiences of the Windrush generation and issues to address today. Ann Farr reports:

Yesterday, individual members and representatives of member organisations gathered in Birmingham from different parts of the country for the NJPN Networking Day. We were privileged to hear Rev Eve Pitts speak. Sharing the personal story of her family gave us a real picture of the experiences of her parents' generation and of their children.

Invited here by the UK Government, and in person by no other than Enoch Powell, to help rebuild Britain after WW11, many left professional work and middle class homes to answer the call to come to the 'Mother Country'! A number travelled on the now famous ship, Windrush, that has given its name to that generation.

Eve, dramatically and poignantly, described the reality of their experience here. They were faced with the infamous notices in the windows of rental accommodation: 'No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs'. Forced to live where they could, they were often in dirty, cramped rooms, sharing even beds with strangers. "They lost their identity and were made to feel, 'less than ...'" Things were so awful that they discussed how long they would stay and decided that five years was the limit. A family trunk was bought and, as savings allowed, items for the return journey were added. Many families still have those trunks, as the return journey was not made, but they have always been a reminder of that intended journey.

Eve described the feelings of the children growing up here, of hearing their parents crying and hurting and not knowing what to do. They heard the 'Lament of Leaving', as parents despaired about the situation they found themselves in, in contrast to their lives at home. The children held meetings to talk about this, without telling their parents.

99% of Caribbean people are Christians, used to attending church, but their experience in churches here was not always welcoming. As a young girl, Eve attended a church that told her not to return because she asked too many questions about the God they presented!

Finances also caused problems as banks refused to lend money or provide mortgages to black people. They saved money cooperatively, in groups similar to Credit Unions, called Partners' Money. They saved in £20 amounts, joining with others if they could not gather that much themselves. Gradually, families were given the opportunity to buy their own homes.

The first black woman vicar in the Church of England, Eve described her calling to be a priest, after her years of challenging the God that was presented as demanding conformity and meekness. Not the God she experienced!

As a life-long campaigner for racial justice, Eve said that in working for justice we have to be aware of history, including the nitty gritty bad bits. Then we have to work out what we do with all this information.

In discussions after her talk, participants mentioned our shame in being so ignorant of Black History and an education system that glorifies the colonisation of other countries. The colonisers stripped them of their assets and boasted about the imposition of an alien culture that was felt to be superior. We questioned both the past and present inhumanity towards refugees and immigrants and that many English people travelled and lived as economic migrants in so many different parts of the world but others coming here were treated so badly.

Eve finished by mentioning that members of her community often ask her for help in attempting to complete the Windrush compensation forms, that are vague and very difficult to navigate. She said the Windrush generation had come in great hope and with generosity and were treated abominably. No amount of compensation can make up for the inhumanity with which they have been treated.

Elsewhere in the day, participants - including diocesan representatives, Pax Christi, the Passionist community, a Christian Climate Action/Laudato Si animator, a Holy Ghost priest, the Chaplain from the Birmingham West Indian Chaplaincy, and Coventry Justice and Peace Group - heard reports and viewed resources on display. Issues being addressed around the country included climate change, ecology, the arms trade, refugee support, and fossil fuel divestment.

The day ended with a short time of quiet, led by Ann Farr, reflecting on all we had shared during the day to remember those whose stories we had heard, those in our network who are unwell and those unable to join us. In the closing days of the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel we shared the prayer 'Among the Rubble' from Pax Christi's Prayer and Action Card.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48083> LINK: NJPN: www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/

LAUDATE DEUM: APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION OF POPE FRANCIS

Source: Vatican Media 4 October 2023

Today, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, the Holy See has published Pope Francis' new Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum (Praise God)* on the climate crisis. In the document the Holy Father addresses the situation of climate change because "a human being who pretends to take the place of God becomes the worst danger to himself" (LD 73) after the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* promulgated on the Solemnity of Pentecost 2015.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, addressed to all people of goodwill, is composed of six Chapters:

In the first, "The Global Climate Crisis," Pope Francis warns that climate change is undeniable, and its effects are becoming increasingly evident "despite some attempts to minimize or ridicule them" (LD 6). He further regrets that the main cause of this problem is human activity and adds that, while we cannot correct such damage, we can still take steps to prevent even more serious damage in the future.

In the second Chapter, the Holy Father addresses the "technocratic paradigm" and stresses that nature is not a resource to be exploited without end and urges us to recognize that unbridled ambition is not ethically sustainable (LD 28).

In the third Chapter, Francis refers to "the weakness of international politics" and stresses the urgent need for global cooperation through new multilateral agreements between States because current and past approaches are insufficient (LD 43).

In the fourth Chapter, the Pope reflects on "climate conferences: progress and failures" and encourages to overcome the selfish positions of countries for the benefit of the global common good (LD 44, 52) and in the fifth Chapter to reflect on "what is expected from COP28 in Dubai?" if we do not want to doom humanity.

In the last chapter, "Spiritual Motivations," the Holy Father calls upon people of all religious confessions to respond. He also reminds Catholics that in the light of faith there is a responsibility to care for God's creation and that this implies respect for the laws of nature and recognition of the beauty and richness of God's creation.

Finally, Pope Francis invites us to walk in communion, together, synodically, and to commit ourselves to "reconciliation with the world that shelters us" (LD 69).

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48157>

Read the full text *Laudate Deum* on Vatican Media:

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html

Watch the official video here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pwe_bd0TUjk&list=PLnS3YdZwNB2x1434IYXDiaZojPjXhoHmy&t=2s

CAFOD WELCOMES LAUDATO DEUM: POPE FRANCIS' RALLYING CALL FOR ACTION ON CLIMATE CRISIS

Source: CAFOD Laura Ouseley 4 October 2023

CAFOD has welcomed Pope Francis' new teaching *Laudato Deum* released today, describing it as a "rousing call to action" on the climate crisis. In the eagerly anticipated follow-up to his 2015 landmark encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis questions what has been achieved in the past eight years and what progress still needs to be made. Pope Francis is direct in his condemnation of profit at any cost, and of the desperation of the situation: "we are now unable to halt the enormous damage we have caused. We barely have time to prevent even more tragic damage" (LD:16). *Laudate Deum* is the first time the phrase "climate crisis" has appeared in an encyclical or exhortation.

Laudate Deum looks at the reality of the climate crisis today, the weakness of international policy regarding the climate crisis ("with the passage of time, I have realized that our responses have not been adequate" - LD:2), calls for real commitment to the planet at the next climate conference in Dubai, and discusses the spiritual motivations for such a fight.

Christine Allen, Director at Catholic aid agency CAFOD, says: "As Pope Francis reminds us, human beings and the earth are not replaceable commodities. We are interdependent and connected. Yet we continue to put greed over and above our love for each other or for our planet. We echo his calls for measures that will help to re-balance our world: including phasing out all fossil fuels and investing in clean energy sources.

"World leaders - including the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak - cannot shirk their responsibility to the millions around the world who have contributed least to the heating of our planet. Instead of making hundreds of trips in private jets, politicians in wealthy countries must lead the way: facing up to our historic responsibility as a major polluter, and providing more financial and technical support for communities to respond to the effects of climate change."

Ahead of COP28 in Dubai next month, *Laudate Deum* holds world leaders and industry giants to account, questioning what has been achieved over the last decade. *Laudate Deum* says that prior Climate Conferences have had a low level of implementation as personal interests are privileged over the common good, appealing to politicians "may they demonstrate the nobility of politics and not its shame" (LD: 60).

"Not enough progress has been made since the Pope's groundbreaking encyclical *Laudato si'*. The effects of climate change and loss of biodiversity have hit the poorest the hardest," said Christine Allen.

The publication of *Laudate Deum* is extraordinary in its commentary of the different international Conference of the Parties (COP) with a very specific call to action at COP28: "If there is sincere interest in making COP28 a historic event that honours and ennobles us as human beings, then one can only hope for binding forms of energy transition" (LD:59).

CAFOD, the official overseas aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, works at the frontline of climate crises and conflict in over 40 countries. As *Laudate Deum* says: "How can we forget that Africa, home to more than half of the world's poorest people, is responsible for a minimal portion of historic emissions?" (LD: 9)

Isacko Molu, Director of Caritas Marsabit in Kenya, a partner of CAFOD, says: "In northern Kenya we are seeing just what happens when world leaders fail to reduce carbon emissions. A painful and prolonged drought - the region's worst in over 40 years - is forcing people from their homes and land. We can't afford more dithering or delays by world leaders. Pope Francis inspires us in our work and is right to lambast the determined work of humans to damage creation. The lands I grew up in as the son of a pastoral farmer are no longer recognisable: barren and dry, they - and the communities who relied upon them - are just some of those who have lost out from the greed and indecision of world leaders."

- CAFOD is the official aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, and part of Caritas International. The agency works in more than 40 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Communities they work with are witnessing the everyday impact of the climate crisis, with extreme weather patterns, drought, flooding and cyclones affecting millions of vulnerable people every year.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48161>

CAFOD: www.cafod.org.uk

BISHOP ARNOLD PRAISES 'TIMELY AND PROPHETIC WORDS' OF POPE FRANCIS IN *LAUDATE DEUM*

4 October 2023: Lead Bishop for Environmental Issues for the Bishops' Conference, and founder of the Laudato si Centre in Manchester, Bishop John Arnold, praises the Pope's intervention as 'timely' and 'vital', saying: "I thoroughly welcome the timely and prophetic words of Pope Francis in *Laudate Deum* who once again implores the international community to alter the path of destruction down which we are heading. He reminds us that we should praise God for all His creatures and that our care for our common home is intimately connected with our care for each other.

"As Pope Francis explains, the decisions we make can have grave consequences, not only for those who are still living, but the generations to follow. We have a duty to take action to look after our planet. 'What is being asked of us is nothing other than a certain responsibility for the legacy we will leave behind, once we pass from this world' (LD18)"

In *Laudate Deum*, the Pope describes climate change leading to drought, extreme weather and global high temperatures as a "silent disease that affects everyone". The Exhortation frequently defines the climate crisis as a 'global societal issue' where the impact and consequences are often felt by the world's poorest people. *Laudate Deum* argues that humans are a part of nature, but that we are currently abusing this position, exploiting natural resources and minerals. Pope Francis writes: "Humans must be recognised as part of nature." He adds: "Let us stop thinking, then, of human beings as autonomous, omnipotent and limitless, and begin to think of ourselves differently, in a humbler but more fruitful way."

Bishop Arnold echoes these thoughts, arguing that the climate crisis gives humanity a good opportunity to consider our relationship with the rest of creation. Bishop Arnold says: "Clearly, the way we are currently living our lives is unsustainable. We need urgent political action, on a global scale, to address this crisis before it's too late. But it's also right that we ask ourselves certain questions. "What is our relationship to God's creation? Is it a resource for us to make profits from, or a precious gift that we are to protect? Are we stewards of the earth, or exploiters?"

Pope Francis also focuses on international cooperation, calling for a new global framework to establish effective rules to safeguard the environment and promote human flourishing. He addresses the lack of progress at the COP international climate conferences and looks ahead to COP28 in Dubai. He urges delegates to "move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned" and to have the "courage needed to produce substantial changes", for "we barely have time to prevent even more damage."

Bishop Arnold also laments the lack of progress since the release of *Laudato si'* in 2015: "The unfortunate thing is that eight years on, several COP meetings later, we really have not been achieving the targets that those meetings have agreed, and the damage is not being reduced. In fact, in some ways, it's increasing."

The Pope does recognise that "every little bit helps" and suggests that efforts by households to reduce pollution and waste, and to consume responsibly, has created a "new culture" and is transformative. He writes: "Let us realize, then, that even though this does not immediately produce a notable effect from the quantitative standpoint, we are helping to bring about large processes of transformation rising from deep within society."

Bishop John Arnold agrees and says we can go further: "There's certainly more we can be doing. The first point of focus is education. Parishes, schools, and Catholic organisations are, on the whole, committed to being good custodians but we need a more joined-up effort to make sure that we are doing our best to repair the damage we've done."

"We've got to press ahead and make sure that we are a voice - a voice to our democratic nation that says we must change our policies and our life as a nation."

Pope Francis finished *Laudate Deum* by explaining why he chose that title: "'Praise God' is the title of this letter. For when human beings claim to take God's place, they become their own worst enemies."
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48158>

THE FEAST OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI 4 OCTOBER

Heather Kiernan writes: We are living through cuts to services and benefits that will disproportionately affect the poor. Concern for the poor was central in the life of St Francis of Assisi. He is a saint for our time, because he stands in a tradition of powerful demands for social justice, confronting head-on all the problems we are grappling with: involvement in wars, poverty, corruption in high places, social exclusion and the wealth-poverty gap.

St Francis offered a vision of a different world, where we share more equally the abundant wealth of goods and life itself as we focus on the right relations to the earth and all our fellow creatures.

This poem by Scottish poet Norman MacCaig makes an important social comment. The speaker exposes the irony that this church, constructed to celebrate a man devoted to the poor, is now a symbol of hypocrisy. Instead of being a lasting monument to the original and noble philosophies of St Francis, it has become celebrated for its architectural merit and the priceless frescoes by Giotto which are housed within it.

While the poor disfigured beggar man outside the basilica is ignored, the tourists who look at and admire the cathedral and are helped to understand Giotto's skills do not have eyes to see the beggar's poverty and suffering.

The irony is that even today beside the glittering towers of civilisation, great riches exist beside great poverty.

ASSISI ~Norman MacCaig

The dwarf with his hands on backwards
sat, slumped like a half-filled sack
on tiny twisted legs from which
sawdust might run,
outside the three tiers of churches built
in honour of St Francis, brother
of the poor, talker with birds, over whom
he had the advantage
of not being dead yet.

A priest explained
how clever it was of Giotto
to make his frescoes tell stories
that would reveal to the illiterate the goodness
of God and the suffering
of His Son. I understood
the explanation and
the cleverness.

A rush of tourists, clucking contentedly,
fluttered after him as he scattered
the grain of the Word. It was they who had passed
the ruined temple outside, whose eyes
wept pus, whose back was higher
than his head, whose lopsided mouth
said Grazie in a voice as sweet
as a child's when she speaks to her mother
or a bird's when it spoke
to St Francis.



**Let Justice
and Peace Flow**
Season of Creation 2023

SILENCE THROUGHOUT THE SYNOD IS PROBABLY WISE, BUT DECISIONS WILL NEED TO BE EXPLAINED ADEQUATELY

Joseph Kelly 6 October 2023

For months now it's been hailed as the most important meeting of minds in the recent history of the Catholic Church, and an event could well produce seismic changes in Catholic doctrine. On the other hand, critics have complained that it's a gathering of extreme exclusivity, internecine agendas and intellectual pomposity when its premise is to remove exactly those negative traits from the Catholic establishment.

The Synod on Synodality has been such a long time in the making, and comes at a time when the Catholic Church has an urgent need to clarify and develop its theology not only for the benefit of the laity, but to reflect unprecedented social changes and global upheavals. For those of us old enough to remember it, this synod has much in common with the Second Vatican Council, which was convened under not entirely dissimilar circumstances.

"I want to open the windows of the Church so that we can see out and the people can see in," said Pope John XXIII at the time.

The trouble that gave rise to Vatican II, and the trouble that Vatican II caused, was primarily due to the sexual revolution of the late 50s and early 1960s. After generations of social invisibility, the younger population in particular had grown tired of the moral strictures of their parents' generations, and so much that society had assumed to be inviolable was suddenly being challenged, or rejected completely. In the face of this moral stampede the Catholic Church had become like a besieged fortress defending itself against the imagined barbarians howling at its gates.

One might easily be forgiven for thinking we've arrived at a somewhat similar juncture today – what with the furore over gender politics, free speech, abortion, euthanasia, global conflict, the climate emergency and the polarisation of the immigration debate. And that's before we factor in our deepening internal and theological divisions.

Little surprise then that many have marked up the Synod on Synodality as Vatican Three Lite.

It's a nice thought – but just as Vatican II promised far more than it delivered, this synod may well go the same way, despite Pope Francis' determination that he wants radical new ground to be broken. As far back as 2016 Francis was revealing to his closest circle that it's "not excluded that I will go down in history as the one who has split the Catholic Church" (at least according to the German magazine *Der Spiegel* – which didn't give a citation!).

For some, this unique and often unpredictable pontificate has the seeds of fantastic expectation and radical reordering within it, for others that same narrative is deeply troubling, heretical even. Where you stand depends largely on whether you think the Catholic Church should lead the world, or provide an antidote to it.

Change in any organisation is never easy, and it's especially difficult in an organisation where its central doctrinal premise is the eternal immutability of certain supposedly self-evident truths.

Pope Francis is in no doubt where he stands; he has a vigorous antagonism towards the structure and outlook of the contemporary Church, which he feels is suffering from a particularly negative and paralysing fortress mentality. More than a decade ago – in an interview after World Youth Day in Argentina – Francis made his position clear: "I want to see the church get closer to the people. I want to get rid of clericalism, the mundane, this closing ourselves off within ourselves, in our parishes, schools or structures. Because these need to get out!" By November of that same year Francis had expanded these thoughts in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium – On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*.

"I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security," he wrote. "I do not want a church concerned with being at the centre and then ends up by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures." (EG,49)

We can only hope that a decade later the Synod will deliver the Catholic laity something that is both meaningful, and relevant to the kind of lives that ordinary Catholics in the street are having to live through at present. Few are present at this great gathering, and the Catholic concerns of the masses have been conveyed to the debating tables by a lengthy process of consultation and upward distillation that in any organisation is rarely a healthy formula for democratic consent or unanimity.

Such a mechanism also tends to create an equally unhealthy return of pronouncements, and even in the first few hours of this synod we've had several prime examples of this.

To take just one instance: earlier this summer a group of five cardinals wrote a letter to Pope Francis asking him to answer five 'dubia', or doubts, that they had relating to the synod. Cardinals Walter Brandmüller (Germany), Robert Sarah (Guinea), Joseph Zen (Hong Kong), Juan Sandoval Íñiguez (Mexico) and Raymond Burke (USA) delivered their letter of concern to Francis on 10th July – but its contents, and the pope's reply, was only made public this week.

Clearly the five cardinals felt that Francis hadn't answered their questions sufficiently, or rather had sidestepped them theologically. Such was their consternation at the pope's replies that they redrafted the five questions in a manner that all but required a yes or no answer. So far there's no indication that Pope Francis has replied and frankly it's unlikely that he ever will, as Francis is not a man to reduce the complexities of the Christian life to a simple – or rather entrapping – 'yes' or 'no'.

The dubia that inevitably grabbed the media attention was the cardinals' question about the validity of marriage and "other types of unions of a sexual nature", and that the blessing of same-sex couples could give rise to a fundamental confusion amongst the laity about their validity, given that the Church otherwise regards such unions as irrevocably sinful. Francis' answer was well-crafted; and clearly too well-crafted for the five cardinals. His response also led many media outlets around the world to announce that Pope Francis was open to blessing gay couples. "Pope Francis suggests gay couples could be blessed in Vatican reversal," shouted *The Guardian* on Tuesday in a conclusion that rang out similarly from media channels across the globe.

Like so many such Catholic pronouncements across my 40+ years in Catholic journalism, everyone is of course right, and everyone is in the same instant equally wrong. Things said between theologians can have many contrary meanings – it's in the very nature of the narrative, just as it's in the nature of journalists to make a headline, and the nature of protagonists to mould words to support their case. Sadly, it's invariably left to the rest of us to make sense of all the clamour, and in particular for grass roots clergy and the laity to peer through the glass darkly and try to discern how such arcane arguments might possibly relate to their lived experiences.

Thus it comes as no surprise that yesterday, as the Synod was finally getting under way, Pope Francis has asked its participants to avoid speaking to the press – and not just during the Synod but afterwards as well. Dr. Paolo Ruffini, the Prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery of Communications, said that the information flow from the meetings will be "very limited," suggesting journalists can report instead on "the absence of news."

It was an announcement that if nothing else revealed that the Vatican knows precious little about the motivations of the media – as trying to shut down controversy is the one sure fire way of putting every journalist on the case. Sadly, the assumption that nothing ever needs to be explained properly, and then trying to hammer down on the discussion after the horse has bolted, is an all too familiar scenario when it comes to the expounding of Catholic teaching. To make matters worse, journalists have not been allowed access to this synod and, whilst there have been no non-disclosure agreements, "canonical penalties" apparently await those who do not maintain their silence, even after the synod is finished. (Much the same applied to the Second Vatican Council, though inevitably some individuals did eventually let slip the odd story here or there!)

Not surprisingly, I'm pretty much on the side of the journalists, who are only ever trying to do their job in difficult circumstances. When I look back over some of the most inflammatory or damaging reports that the media has run about Catholic affairs across the past four decades, much of the damage could have been avoided if the Church had engaged and explained when matters first materialised. Few things are so terrible that they can't be confronted, and they're best confronted as early as possible; prevarication and procrastination invariably lead to rumour and exaggeration.

For the record on the Pope Francis gay blessings story, His Holiness reiterated that matrimony is a union between a man and a woman, but that "pastoral charity" might give a priest the justification to bestow a blessing on a same-sex couple, so long as this was seen as the Church expressing its love and concern for the couple, but absolutely not endorsing their sinful behaviour. "For this reason, pastoral prudence must adequately discern whether there are forms of benediction, requested by one or more persons, that do not transmit a mistaken conception of marriage," Francis wrote. "Because when a benediction is requested, it is expressing a request for help from God, a plea to be able to live better, a trust in a father who can help us to live better."

He said there were situations objectively "not morally acceptable" but the same "pastoral charity" required that people be treated as sinners who might not be fully at fault for their situations.

But Francis also added that these circumstances were exceptions rather than the norm, “because the life of the church runs on channels beyond norms”. All of which makes perfect sense theologically, but also makes an entirely other kind of perfect sense to a non-Catholic journalist and headline writer.

Like I said, it’s one of the great joys and frustrations of being a member of the Catholic faith that on matters of import we are often all right, and we are often all wrong.

Given the events of the past few days, a silence throughout the synod is probably a wise decision, but sooner or later someone is going to have to tell the Catholic world exactly what we’re required to be thinking in the years ahead, and in a way that please God we’ll be able to understand and live with.

<https://www.thecatholicnetwork.co.uk/silence-throughout-the-synod-is-probably-wise-but-decisions-will-need-to-be-well-explained>

• **Joseph Kelly is a Catholic publisher and theologian**

SYNOD RETREAT MEDITATIONS LED BY FR TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE OP

First Synod Retreat Meditation ‘Hoping against hope’ <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48139>

Second Synod Retreat Meditation ‘At home in God and God at home in us’

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48141>

Third Synod Retreat Meditation ‘Friendship’ <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48149>

Fourth Synod Retreat Meditation ‘Conversation on the way to Emmaus’

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48150>

Fifth Synod Retreat Meditation ‘Authority’ <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48155>

Sixth Synod Retreat Meditation ‘The Spirit of Truth’ <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48159>

‘PRACTISING SYNODALITY’ WEBINAR SERIES CONTINUES

5 October 2023: While the first Synod assembly of the 2021-24 Synod is taking place in Rome, the School for Synodality is hosting a series of webinars about how we can practise synodality at the local level. With speakers from both England and Wales and from across the world, we’ll continue to explore what the practice of Synodality could look like in our own communities.

Already we’ve heard from Dr Jessie Rogers (Dean of Faculty of Theology, St Patrick’s Pontifical University, Maynooth) who helped us explore what synodality is, and from Ciaran Beary (facilitation and leadership consultant, including for the UN) and Fr Kevin O’Driscoll (Parish Priest at Holy Family Catholic Church, Slough) who helped us explore power and trust.

Synodality, a cornerstone of Pope Francis’s vision for the Church, emphasises dialogue, listening, and shared decision-making. The ‘Practising Synodality’ webinar series is designed to equip attendees with the knowledge and skills to integrate synodality into their everyday practices.

In the coming weeks we’ll be joined by a series of speakers on a range of topics:

9 October: *Best and worst practices - learning on the way* – Fr Matthew Nunes and Fr Phillip Inch, co-moderators of the Archdiocese of Liverpool Synod

16 October: *Discerning the signs of the times* – Sarah Adams, Director for the Department of Adult Education and Evangelisation in the Diocese of Clifton and participant in the European Continental Assembly in spring 2023

30 October: *The art of listening: hearing all the voices* – Sr Ngozie (Sierra Leone), in partnership with CAFOD

6 November: *Group discernment: how do we know it’s the Holy Spirit?* – Mauricio Lopez, Executive Secretary of CEAMA (Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon)

13 November: *Moving to action* – TBC

20 November: *Becoming a synodal community* – Professor Anna Rowlands, Office for Synod, Vatican and Durham University

Each webinar, held from 7.30-8.30 on Monday nights, includes an interview with the speaker and time for Q&A from those watching live. **You can register for upcoming webinars, and watch those that have already taken place here:** www.schoolforsynodality.org.uk/practising-synodality-webinars

Read more about the School for Synodality: www.SchoolforSynodality.org.uk

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48169>

WHOSE JUSTICE?

From the latest newsletter from Together for the Common Good – do explore the links below and sign up for this excellent free resource – Ed.

If you shut your ears to the cry of the poor, you too will cry out and not be answered - Proverbs 21:13

Hardship and inequality are growing and poor communities are suffering. Faced with this, most Christians, wanting to see an end to injustice, tend to campaign for higher government benefits, or try to donate more to charity. But is this really how justice is achieved?

In political philosophy, there are three main visions of justice: maximising human welfare, maximising human freedom, and maximising human virtues. They focus, respectively, on economic utility, liberty and rights, and human flourishing and the common good.

This third, ethical tradition is becoming increasingly unfashionable in policy circles, but it corresponds most closely with the biblical vision of justice. Jesus, who lived in Galilee under Roman occupation, resisted the dehumanising effects of that unjust arrangement by introducing people to God's kingdom, and through his special love for the poor. Like the prophets, Christ advocates justice in Jewish terms - that is, through righteousness, or *tsedeq*, which leads us, as bearers of God's image, to live in right relationship with each other, and through *mishpat*, the actions we each take to treat people equitably.

But the dominant contemporary vision of justice is quite unlike this. Our neoliberal politics is not founded on righteousness, virtue, or relationships. Instead its low wage economy is conjoined with a utilitarian approach to mitigate the poverty it creates.

This is the welfarist strategy. It is not only defeatist and inefficient. Not only a system requiring vast sums of public subsidy to prop up wages too low for people to live on, it is also inherently dysfunctional and therefore unstable. By going along with this, Christians inadvertently help to perpetuate a state of affairs that is fundamentally unjust. Raising benefits to meet essential needs may be imperative in the short term. But in the long term, campaigns to end poverty through welfarism repress and marginalise prophetic justice.

In contrast, the common good tradition of justice does not tinker at the edges but demands fundamental economic reform. Churches which reject that tradition, which remain unable to challenge the neoliberal-utilitarian approach, can only alienate the "marginalised" communities they say they want to reach.

What does "the cry of the poor" actually sound like? It can be heard in the justifiable anger that lies beneath the rise of so-called populism. It is the cry of intense frustration with a political class which has, for over four decades, allowed an unjust system to carry on. This rage is justified. Many communities with proud civic histories have been utterly abandoned and humiliated. The majority of churches thus far have voiced no serious critique of the system that led to this civic degradation.

There was a time when the church could be relied upon to offer resistance to injustice. But currently, those communities feel as abandoned by the church as they do by the political class. The estrangement may seem hopeless. However, if the church can bring itself to recognise the legitimacy of that rage, then hope can be found. If there is solidarity between the church and poor communities, then hope for both can be found.

When we think about apparent church decline, we might consider whether God could be humbling the church so that in its poverty it can realise its need for others, especially the poor. As Pope Francis has said, the church needs to be re-evangelised by the poor.

The vision of justice within Catholic social thought has always included a just economy. In fact, as a virtue-based framework, its stated purpose is more ambitious: to build a civilisation of love. This is to be achieved by spiritual as well as social, political and economic means - and should be integral to our understanding of evangelisation. It begins with righteousness, fidelity to God, who has told His children repeatedly how He wants them to live. The principles of the CST framework are rooted in the gospel.

The preferential option for the poor, modelled by Christ himself, requires us all to take responsibility and support the flourishing of family, community and place, and to do so personally through relationship, not just to outsource that support to the state.

The dignity of work requires measures such as incentives for job creation, place-based investment, and vocational training. The aim is to cultivate thriving communities, because it is in local relationships that the human person finds belonging, meaning and purpose.

Subsidiarity is meant to keep the state from distorting from above the organic life of community from below. Subsidiarity insists that decisions are taken as close as possible to those they affect and that a central authority should only do tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level.

In this time of unravelling, and as governments become increasingly centralised, it is vital that Christians recognise the different traditions of justice at work. The poet and essayist T.S. Eliot flagged the danger of the utilitarian temptation, and warned of "dreaming of systems so perfect that no one needs to be good."

The biblical interpretation of justice is to foster right relationships, resist domination and uphold the integrity of the human being. As Christians, our vision of justice must derive from a philosophy consistent with our faith, which reflects the truth of our identity: we are the image bearers of God. This common good vision of justice is non-partisan. It requires power to be distributed and calls us to be suspicious of overly centralised power. But too often the contemporary churches fail to offer any resistance to the principalities and powers. Either faith is placed in the narrow logic of a false freedom, or in the state as the primary port of call for social problems. Both are a temptation and forms of idolatry.

The churches are called to the kind of justice that builds right relationships. We are to encourage, and participate in, forms of association that privilege the poor in local communities. Like Jesus, we are to live an incarnational theology that tangibly weaves itself into all aspects of our daily experience, that walks with neighbours, navigating together the risks and pains of mortal life.

Find out more: <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/about/common-good-thinking>
<https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/about/catholic-social-thought>

COLUMBANS LAUNCH SCHOOLS COMPETITION: 'BIODIVERSITY MATTERS'

Source: Columban Missionaries 7 September 2023

The Columban Missionaries in Britain and Ireland have announced the launch of their latest Schools Media Competition 2023-2024 which has the title: '*Biodiversity Matters*'. The competition is aimed at students aged between 13-18 years old who are invited to explore Biodiversity – the richness of life forms on Earth and which humanity relies on for health, food and well-being. It is looking for pieces of writing and images that demonstrate an awareness and understanding of the issue of Biodiversity and highlight people, communities and/or organisations trying to build a sustainable future. Pope Francis has told us that "because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God ... We have no such right" (*Laudato Si'* #33)

Columbans worldwide see the devastating impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss on people and the environment as interwoven moral issues in need of prophetic responses. Inspiration for action is drawn from the 2015 teaching document by Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*.

In his role as Columban Justice and Peace Education Worker in Britain, James Trewby visits young people in schools and sixth forms and runs workshops, retreats and assemblies to promote justice, peace and the integrity of creation. He says: "I'm delighted that the Columban Schools Media Competition this year focuses on the theme of Biodiversity. In a world of increasing globalisation and environmental degradation, management of biological diversity is one of the most important and critical challenges facing humankind today. The Columbans are keen to nurture the student voice and provide an opportunity for young people to engage with this issue."

Encouraging creativity and faith engagement with issues in the world today, this year's competition welcomes both written and image entries until the closing date of 17 February 2024. Winners will be announced on Columban media on 21 March 2024, the International Day of Forests. Two separate competitions will be judged, one for students in Ireland and one for students in Britain. Cash prizes will be awarded to the winning entrants and the first prize is an impressive £500 or 500 euros! High-profile judges from the world of journalism have been secured, who write for the Irish News, The Irish Times, The Tablet and Independent Catholic News. Also, Catholic experts on environmental protection and education, including Columban eco-theologian Fr Sean McDonagh, Mary Colwell and Jane Mellett. Winning entries will be published in the Columbans' Far East magazine, Vocation for Justice newsletter, Columban websites in Ireland and Britain, Columban social media and in other Catholic media.

Schools will find the Columban Competition website a useful resource. It includes information on the theme, examples of Church work on Biodiversity, Catholic Social Teaching on the theme of Biodiversity and information about inspirational Catholics working on the issue. There are also details on submission of entries and a helpful FAQ page. The website provides material suitable for students, teachers and parents.

www.columbancompetition.com/ <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/47959>

SOCIETY NEEDS TO GET AN URGENT GRIP OF THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF KNIFE CRIME

Joseph Kelly 29 September 2023

The dreadful killing of 15-year-old Elianne Andam, who was stabbed in the neck with a kitchen knife on her way to school, has not only shocked the south Croydon community where it happened, but the nation as a whole. Elianne was one of 15 young people to lose their lives on the streets of London so far this year alone, in what seems to most people to be a worrying escalation in random acts of brutality involving young people.

Before we go any further, it's worth noting a few statistics about knife crime: The number of knife or sharp instrument offences recorded by the police in London rose to approximately 12,786 in 2022/23, compared with 11,122 in the previous year. Across England and Wales generally there has been a 75% increase in knife crimes since 2013, with the police recording 50,489 knife or sharp instrument offences in the last 12 months alone. Last year there were 282 knife-related murders in England and Wales, the highest figure since 1946.

In the case of this week's tragedy, a 17-year-old boy has been charged with the murder of Elianne Andam, which effectively curtails speculation about the reasons for this senseless killing. Earlier newspaper reports had intimated that the 17 year-old had tried to give flowers to an ex-girlfriend as she got off the school bus, and Elianne was fatally stabbed as she tried to intervene and protect the girl.

Whatever did occur, a family's peace and hopes have been shattered forever in a momentary event that that seems to have all the hallmarks of so many such crimes – an innocent person being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It hardly seems possible that the country is still having exactly the same conversation it had 30 years ago when it was learnt that 18 year-old Stephen Lawrence was stabbed to death in another south London street, after he and a friend changed their regular bus route home and ran into a gang of youths.

Just a year later, 12 year-old Nikki Conroy was stabbed to death by a mentally unstable intruder who had broken into her Middlesbrough school, and in 1995 Irish school headmaster Philip Lawrence was stabbed fatally outside the gates of his Catholic secondary school in London's Maida Vale when he tried to defend a pupil who was being attacked by a gang. Thus started a long, painfully still unresolved public debate about the nature and remedies for the growing scourge of knife crime.

All too often, when the cause of such a crime is established – be it racism, insanity, revenge or argument – the conclusion serves not only as the motive, but as the explanation, especially when society isn't anxious to confront the more profound questions that such crimes pose.

Every individual murder will have its explanation, but the seemingly growing inclination to fatal violence urgently warrants a far deeper enquiry.

At its most simple level, violent crime has been with us since the dawn of humanity, and was one the first remembered actions of mankind after the Fall. It comes down to us with the imprint of Cain, making it one of the earliest and most reviled of human deviances, and the second mortal sin committed in the human condition. This also makes it one of the hardest human traits to correct, as countless centuries of altercations have only found their ultimate resolution in the taking of life.

Murder as a means of solving differences or disputes is not only inhuman and uncivilised, but it's particularly inefficient and negative in terms of resolution and evolution. Whether it's a single murder or wholesale warfare, we humans still seem unable to learn the obvious lesson that the taking of another's life only leads to further recriminations, untold misery and even more bloodshed.

Whilst it might seem anathema to us, our neighbour clearly doesn't necessarily share our revulsion for the taking of another human life, even in the most trivial of circumstances. Remedies to such human aberrations have varied over the centuries, but the default position has tended to be that of Leviticus 24:19-21 – 'an eye for an eye' – and thus the remedy for taking one life has been to take another in reparation. It took us until 1965 to repeal that lunacy. The Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act 1965 recognised that there needed to be a better dissuasion for murder than execution, but legislation has struggled since to build a society where every human life has an equal and inviolate value. In fact, all the signs are that human life has continued to become devalued, and it's unlikely that actions such as the restoration of the death penalty for murder would have any positive impact at all.

One only has to look at the nature of the most recent murders in society to recognise that the perpetrators bear no awareness of the seriousness of their actions, nor are they the least bit concerned about even the most severe consequences. Clearly something more fundamental has gone wrong with the human condition.

Whilst it's not helpful to paint a picture of a country where walking the streets is a profound danger, there is clearly something deteriorating – even if such encounters and tragedies are thankfully still exceptionally rare.

Unfortunately, knife crime in particular presents profound challenges to both the criminologist and the social reformer, and we really don't seem to have made very much progress in resolving the problem. Perhaps this is because society still tends to see knife crime as an intermediary act of violence sitting somewhere in between physical assault and shooting. This underestimation of its seriousness has given rise to numerous well-meaning strategies based on the flawed premise that perpetrators are principally delinquent teenagers requiring a modicum of social intervention and rehabilitation to correct their behaviour.

To make matters worse, a commonly-heard commitment (especially from legislators) to become ever more 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' has the reverse effect of exacerbating the fear, exclusion and discrimination that leads to many such crimes in the first place. Coming down hard on knife crime may seem like a popular response, but there is little or no evidence that more vigilant policing, Knife Crime Prevention Orders and heavier sentencing have any impact on an individual carry a knife with possible intent to use it.

A more productive approach would be to build recognition – amongst young people in particular – that knife crime is a uniquely brutal, primitive and invasive act of violence against another human person that has no place in a modern, civil democracy.

Most knife crime begins with the fear that carrying a personal weapon is necessary in a society where others may be doing the same. Sadly, this isn't a misconception, and adults in particular need to wake up to the fact that knife-carrying amongst young people is far more common and widespread than we'd like to acknowledge, and the threat of prison does absolutely nothing to stop this.

Adult society also needs to accept culpability for creating landscapes in which random and inconsequential violent behaviour has become heavily normalised. It's a tragic irony that it's today's older generations – many of whom invented, built and marketed mass media, the internet and its connected devices – are those who are complaining the loudest about the impact of such developments on subsequent generations.

Any parent who has looked over the shoulder of a teenager playing *Call of Duty*, *Assassin's Creed* or *Grand Theft Auto* will know that such global cult activities aren't exactly teaching young people about the value of building a better society and the individual worth of the human person.

It needs to be remembered that young people are generally the product of what they have been given by those who went before, and rarely what they have created for themselves.

This also extends to the home and its circumstances, another area into which social engineers are often reluctant to tread – for fear of being seen as defining knife crime as a class or social nuanced phenomenon. In fact, evidence-based research has demonstrated unequivocally that domestic violence and adverse childhood experiences are one of the main drivers of knife crime, and a year-on-year increase in reported incidents of violence in the home is a worrying indicator of future risk. Unemployment – itself a profound disruptor of home life – is also a recognised driver of knife-related crimes, so it would be helpful if we began to see the carrying of a weapon not as a distinct problem of itself, but as the continuation of a path already marked by violence of varying types.

Sadly, given the present social preoccupation with lauding diversity of circumstance, identity, self-defined morality and relativism, it's probably going to take some time before society finally comes round to the conclusion that we Christians have always known – a stable, loving family is the foundation of a stable, caring society and the disruption of this unit is the root cause of most subsequent social disorders.

<https://www.thecatholicnetwork.co.uk/society-needs-to-get-an-urgent-grip-of-the-underlying-causes-of-knife-crime-says-joseph-kelly/>

- Joseph Kelly is a Catholic publisher and theologian.

FIGHT FOR A BETTER WORLD WITH CAFOD AND SIGN UP FOR THEIR FAITH IN ACTION EVENT

Saturday 18 November, 10.30am - 2.30pm

This is an online event, and is really important in the lead up to COP28.

CAFOD writes: - *From climate change to the global food crisis, the world is currently facing numerous challenges that stand in the way of each person reaching their full potential. It is vital we all come together to build a better world.*

To read more about the day, and register for it, go to Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/faith-in-action-fighting-for-a-better-world-with-cafod-tickets-706636638207>

CHALLENGE POVERTY WEEK, 16-22 OCTOBER

Source: Church Action on Poverty: Challenge Poverty Week England & Wales 2023 is taking place between the 16 and the 22 of October this year. If you'd like to take part during the week, now is a good time to start thinking about it. Challenge Poverty Week is a week of action, an opportunity to stand up and ask for change as a movement. This year's theme is '*Dignity for all: a more hopeful future.*' We want to look at how to find and use lasting, dignified solutions to poverty, creating a better future for everyone.

Recent polling shows that almost 90% of people across the UK say it's important that more is done to tackle poverty. That overwhelming demand for action and change needs to be heard and heeded by people in power. With elections for Parliament and regional mayors approaching in 2024, let's make sure all our voices are heard. Let's call for policies and plans that ensure the dignity of everyone in our communities. Let's speak out for a more hopeful future and show how we can get there. And let's celebrate the work of people, organisations and communities across England and Wales that are already coming together to uphold people's dignity.

Church Action on Poverty has created tools and resources for you to use leading up to, and during the week. A Challenge Poverty Week Toolkit is available, full of practical ideas and tips to get the most out of the week, key messages and advice on how to make Challenge Poverty Week a springboard for a lasting impact. <https://challengepoverty.co.uk/>

If you'd like to be updated when we've created new content or when there is news related to Challenge Poverty Week, subscribe to our mailing at: <https://challengepoverty.co.uk/get-involved/email/>
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/47719>

IRANIAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER NARGES MOHAMMADI WINS NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

6 October 2023: Narges Mohammadi has campaigned for women's rights and the abolition of the death penalty and an improvement of prison conditions inside Iran. She is currently serving multiple sentences in Tehran's Evin prison amounting to about 12 years' imprisonment, according to the rights organisation Front Line Defenders, the latest of the many periods she has been detained. Charges against her include spreading propaganda against the state.

"The Norwegian Nobel committee has decided to award the 2023 Nobel peace prize to Narges Mohammadi for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all," the committee said in its citation.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the British-Iranian dual-national who shared a prison cell with Mohammadi in Evin, said: "I am so pleased for her. It makes me cry. She did so much for all of us in Evin. Narges is an inspiration and a pillar to the women in the female ward in Evin for her fearless fight against violation of women's rights, use of solitary confinement and execution in the judicial system in Iran. This award belongs to every single Iranian woman who, one way or another, has been and remain to be a victim of injustice in Iran."

The award will be viewed as a tribute to the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran that rocked the clerical establishment last year but has been suppressed with many activists either killed or in jail. The protests were sparked by the death in police custody of a young Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, after she had been arrested for not wearing the hijab in line with state rules. The conflict over the wearing of the hijab continues.

Read more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/06/jailed-iranian-activist-narges-mohammadi-wins-2023-nobel-peace-prize>

Reacting to the news Amnesty International's Secretary General, Agnès Callamard said: "Narges Mohammadi receives this prize today from behind bars in Iran where she has been unjustly imprisoned since 2021 solely for her human rights activism. For years, she has worked tirelessly to bring attention to the dire human rights situation in Iran. Even from her prison cell, she condemned the authorities' bloody crackdown on nationwide protests, called for the abolition of the death penalty and the prohibition of solitary confinement, and exposed sexual violence against women protesters in detention.

"Her recognition today by the Nobel Peace committee sends a clear message to the Iranian authorities that their crackdown on peaceful critics and human rights defenders will not go unchallenged. The international community must make renewed efforts to push for Narges Mohammadi's immediate and unconditional release as well as that of all other women and men who have been unjustly imprisoned simply for peacefully exercising their human rights, including in the aftermath of the 'Woman Life Freedom' protests of 2022." <https://www.womanlifefreedom.today/>
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/nobel-peace-prize-winner-narges-mohammadi-must-be-released-immediately-and-unconditionally/>

DIARY OCTOBER

8 Prisons Sunday <https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/Pages/Category/markings-prisoners-sunday>

8-14 Prisons Week of Prayer <https://www.prisonweek.org/>

13 CAFOD Quiz in Our Lady's Parish Centre Ellesmere Port starting at 7.30pm. As usual there will be a raffle with good prizes and entry is still only £3 - contact Tony Walsh 0151 355 6419

14 CWDF Forum meeting, 7pm at The Unity Centre 17 Cuppin Street, Chester CH1 2BJ. CWDF member Peter Spiers, and Philip Austin – coordinator of Northern Friends Peace Board – will talk on the subject of work for peace, with a specific focus on Quaker initiatives. The presentation will be followed by a small celebration of the 30 years of CWDF's activities.

16-22 Challenge Poverty Week England & Wales 2023 'Dignity for all: a more hopeful future' (see page 14) <https://challengepoverty.co.uk/get-involved/email/>

NOVEMBER

17 CAFOD Quiz in Our Lady's Parish Centre Ellesmere Port starting at 7.30pm. see October 13

18 Stockport Fairtrade Fair 10 am – 4pm Stockport Guildhall 169 Wellington Road on A6 close to Co- op shop SK1 3UA

DON'T MISS THE LATEST NJPN E BULLETIN WITH A WEALTH OF ARTICLES AND INFO: Download here: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/app/uploads/2023/10/NJPN-E-Bulletin-1st-October-2023.pdf>

● **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

● **Read the AUTMN issue of MOUTHPEACE the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses** <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-north-west/autumn-mouthpeace-2023/>

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

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