

NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin Mid November 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

TODAY I AM TAKING SIDES

Today I am taking sides.

I am taking the side of Peace.
Peace, which I will not abandon
even when its voice is drowned out
by hurt and hatred,
bitterness of loss,
cries of right and wrong.

I am taking the side of Peace
whose name has barely been spoken
in this winnerless war.

I will hold Peace in my arms,
and share my body's breath,
lest Peace be added
to the body count.

I will call for de-escalation
even when I want nothing more
than to get even.
I will do it
in the service of Peace.

I will make a clearing
in the overgrown
thicket of cause and effect
so Peace can breathe
for a minute
and reach for the sky.

I will do what I must
to save the life of Peace.
I will breathe through tears.
I will swallow pride.
I will bite my tongue.
I will offer love
without testing for deservingness.

So don't ask me to wave a flag today
unless it is the flag of Peace.

Don't ask me to sing an anthem
unless it is a song of Peace.
Don't ask me to take sides
unless it is the side of Peace.

Rabbi Irwin Keller, 17 October 2023

STATEMENT ON THE DEVASTATION, VIOLENCE, AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN ISRAEL AND GAZA

"I mourn the tragic, brutal deaths of people in Israel at the hands of Hamas and the tragic, brutal Palestinian deaths from bombings by Israeli military forces.

I will not join in rhetoric that diminishes Palestinian or Israeli deaths as consequences of injustice or as casualties that must happen in response to terrorism. Children are being annihilated and families wiped out in the midst of our debates and denunciations. And our discourse sinks lower and lower into dangerous speech and provocation of more violence."

"Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love.

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy, instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.

Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

— **Dr. Martin Luther King**

"These words from my father remind us that violence is a descending spiral and a destructive force that leaves behind a trail of suffering, hate, and desolation, affecting generations to come. As you read them, please consider how we each can be a purveyor for true peace.

I call on political, civic and faith leaders in the U.S. and in other nations to work for true peace in Israel and Gaza. True peace includes truth; understanding our interconnectedness; exploring humane pathways forward; and justice, which my father defined as "love correcting everything that stands against love."

Dr. Bernice A. King, CEO The King Center, 12 October 2023

<https://thekingcenter.org/our-ceo-dr-bernice-a-kings-statement-on-the-devastation-violence-and-humanitarian-crisis-in-israel-and-gaza/>

• **Dr. Bernice A. King** is the daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Heather Kiernan writes: Peace has perhaps never felt so distant for Israel and Palestine as it does now. But amid the horrors of this war, it's easy to forget that out there – on both sides of the border – are ordinary people working tirelessly in their communities and across divides to achieve it. This prayer was written by Rose Berger, poet, Catholic peace activist and senior editor at Sojourners magazine.

“They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain...” —Isaiah 11:9

God of Comfort,
send your Spirit to encompass all those whose lives
are torn apart by violence and death in Israel and Palestine.
You are the Advocate of the oppressed
and the One whose eye is on the sparrow.
Let arms reach out in healing, rather than aggression.
Let hearts mourn rather than militarize.

God of Justice,
give strength to those whose long work for a just peace
might seem fruitless now. Strengthen their resolve.
Do not let them feel alone. Show us how to support their work
and bolster their courage. Guide religious leaders to model
unity and reconciliation across lines of division.
Guide political leaders to listen with their hearts as they seek peace and pursue it.
Help all people choose the rigorous path of just peace and disavow violence.

God of Love,
we lift up Palestine and Israel — its people, its land, its creatures.
War is a monster that consumes everything in its path.
Peace is a gift shared at meals of memory with Christians, Muslims, and Jews.
Let us burn incense, not children. Let us break bread, not bodies.
Let us plant olive groves, not cemeteries.
We beg for love and compassion to prevail on all your holy mountains.

God of Hope,
we lift up the cities of the region: Gaza City and Tel Aviv,
Ramallah and Ashkelon, Deir El Balah and Sderot,
so long divided, yet so filled with life and creativity.
Come again to breathe peace on your peoples that all may recognize you.

God of Mercy,
even now work on the hearts of combatants
to choose life over death, reconciliation over retaliation,
restoration over destruction.
Help us resist antisemitism in all its forms, especially in our own churches.
All people, Israelis and Palestinians,
deserve to live in peace and unafraid,
with a right to determine their future together.

God of the Nations,
let not one more child or elder be sacrificed on altars of political expediency.
Keep safe all people from unjust leaders
who would exploit vulnerability for their own distorted ends.
Give wise discernment to those making decisions to pursue peace.
Provide them insight into fostering well-being, freedom, and thriving for all.
Teach all of us to resolve injustices with righteousness, not rockets.
Guard our hearts against retaliation, and give us hearts for love alone.
Strengthen our faith in you, O God of All Flesh,
even when we don't have clear answers,
so that we may still offer ourselves non-violently for the cause of peace.
Amen.

VIOLENCE AND MYTHS

Jon Swales, 12 October 2023: I was laid awake last night thinking about the horror unfolding in Gaza and Israel. I got up this morning and wrote down a few thoughts. Although I see the discussion below as important, discussion isn't meant to distract from the real human cost of this conflict or practical solutions in terms of humanitarian support and peacemaking.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Human beings are complex creatures, possessing a profound duality within themselves. On one hand, they exhibit an innate capacity for love, compassion, and the bestowal of blessings upon their fellow humans. This capacity underscores our shared humanity and the ability to forge meaningful connections with one another. Yet, on the other hand, humans also harbour the potential for darkness, which can manifest in harm, cruelty, and even the perpetration of horrific acts of violence against one another.

As social beings, we transcend individual interactions to form communities, whether large or small. Within these communities, our capacities and inclinations are magnified and amplified. This dynamic means that while love and care can thrive within the nurturing embrace of a community, the potential for harm can escalate dramatically when groups of humans unite. In essence, communities, whether they are built upon principles of empathy and love or founded upon aggression and violence, wield immense power in shaping the destinies of individuals and even nations on a grand scale.

The darker aspect of this human predicament is most vividly revealed in our approach to bringing about change through communal conflicts, such as wars. These conflicts serve as tragic testaments to our capacity for violence and the profound and devastating consequences it can unleash. Astonishingly, the very same individuals and communities capable of acts of kindness, compassion, and love toward one another can, at the same time, inflict brutality and suffering upon others.

The transition from individual actions to collective endeavours is closely intertwined with the influence of myths. Myths are the narratives that weave together the social fabric of communities, imparting shared values, histories, and dreams. They form the cultural and ideological bedrock upon which societies are constructed. Myths provide a sense of purpose and direction that guides the course of history and shapes the ethical principles governing a society.

In the deeply entrenched and intricate conflict between Israel and Gaza, myths play a central and, at times, tragic role. These myths serve as the ideological fuel that, when ignited, leads to death and destruction. The shared imaginary—the myths—take on a life of their own within groups like Hamas and the Israeli armed forces. It is crucial to recognize that these conflicts are not solely propelled by immediate factors, such as the treatment and suffering of Palestinians in Gaza or the actual rocket attacks and kidnappings of Israelis. Instead, they are fuelled by deeply ingrained myths that shape the collective identity and purpose of these opposing groups.

These myths encompass various elements, including religious and historical narratives, notions of nationhood, and ideas of exceptionalism. They also include an anthropology—a narrative about the worth and dignity of human beings, whether they belong to one's own community or to those beyond it.

In the midst of this conflict, it becomes evident that many Israelis and Palestinians, though not all, have embraced a particular myth—the myth of redemptive violence. This myth asserts that, at times, extreme violence is not only ethically justifiable but can also bring about redemption or salvation. It espouses the belief that violence, when wielded in pursuit of a higher purpose or cause, can lead to a brighter future.

However, this perspective stands in stark contrast to an alternative viewpoint that recognizes the destructive nature of violence. From this perspective, violence is seen not as a path to redemption but as a destructive spiral, where one act of violence begets another in an unending cycle of suffering and retribution. (You may be interested in my previous post on the myth of redemptive violence: <https://www.cruciformjustice.com/post/jesus-the-myth-of-redemptive-violence>)

In essence, the human capacity for both love and violence, the influence of communal myths, and the tragic outcomes of conflicts like the one between Israel and Gaza serve as profound reminders of the intricate and often perplexing nature of our shared human experience. Within this complexity, there lies both a challenge and an opportunity—to strive for a world where love and compassion triumph over the darker aspects of our nature.

Confronting this challenge calls for a courageous step toward challenging and transcending the destructive myths that perpetuate conflict and violence. It necessitates a collective effort to develop new mythical structures, or perhaps to draw inspiration from ancient mythic stories and structures that embody hope, peace, joy, and the cessation of war. As Jesus reminds us, "Blessed are the peacemakers." By embracing and promoting narratives that celebrate peace and reconciliation, we embark on a journey to reshape the cultural and ideological foundations upon which societies are built. These alternative myths can inspire us to seek non-violent resolutions to conflicts, promote understanding and dialogue, and ultimately pave the way for a more harmonious and compassionate world. In doing so, we acknowledge the human capacity for transformation, offering a glimmer of hope amid the shadows of conflict and despair.

<https://www.cruciformjustice.com/post/violence-and-myths>

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

• **Rev'd Jon Swales is an ordained Priest in the Church of England.** He heads up Lighthouse, a fresh expression of church for adults battered and bruised by the storms of life <https://www.lighthousewestyorkshire.org.uk/> Alongside this Jon is involved in theological education and is currently a tutor with Leeds School of Theology, St Hild and Niagara School of Missional Leadership <https://leeds-school-of-theology.org/mission-theology-ministry-for-the-margins/> Jon is passionate about peacemaking & climate justice and seeks through prayer and activism to be a prophetic witness to the church.

PLEASE GOD THERE WILL BE SOME FORGIVENESS FOR OUR INACTION OVER GAZA

Joseph Kelly 14 November 2023: It may have been the Tories who've grabbed the headlines so far this week, with Suella Braveman out and David Cameron in, but tomorrow it could be Labour's turn to implode. As the sun sets on the day, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer is tonight pondering whether or not to put Labour's position on the Israel-Hamas conflict to a vote tomorrow in an effort to maintain party unity. Rumour has it that any Commons motion will stop short of calling for a ceasefire, but will express the party's criticism of the war. Quite what this is intended to achieve only Sir Keir knows, but it won't quell the growing rebellion in his party over Labour's implied support for Israel's punitive actions in Gaza.

Some 70 Labour MPs have already digressed from their party line, including 19 frontbench members, in calling for a ceasefire. Like many other political leaders, Starmer is of the view that any pullback in the current assault and bombardment will only give Hamas the opportunity to regroup and re-arm, and possibly commit a repeat of the dreadful attack of 7th October. Instead, Starmer – who is a lawyer both by training and political strategy – has pinned his hopes on a 'humanitarian pause' which, rather than an actual ceasefire, is like everyone having a couple of days (or possibly even just hours) off from the carnage to get food, water and supplies in, and the most severely injured civilians out – and then everything kicks off again. Or at least that's how more than a third of his MPs now see it.

To be fair to Starmer, this is only a reflection of the UK, US and EU view that Israel must be allowed to rip through Gaza to complete whatever retribution it feels appropriate – and the annihilation of the civilian population, whilst very regrettable, is in the nature of war and collateral damage. Quite how a British Labour has arrived at this philosophic position is a mystery, given the party's predominantly pacifist and mediatory history, but these are the political days we're living through. Over the weekend human rights group Amnesty International also waded in, accusing the Labour leader of failing to show "the clear and principled leadership that this decades-old crisis needs", and this is the ambiguity now threatening to tear his party apart.

When Hamas struck on 7th October, at least 1,400 people were butchered and 224 were taken hostage. Whilst figures from a war zone should always be treated with caution, it's estimated that 11,000 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip since Israel retaliated (one month ago) and the country's infrastructure is in total collapse – which by any account is a very questionable interpretation of proportionality, a key condition of the ethics of modern warfare.

That said, it should be pointed out that the 7th October attack, whilst horrendous, cannot be used in International Humanitarian Law as justification for what is happening now, as the war currently raging has its root causes in much earlier events. Whilst it will be extremely difficult for Israelis in particular to get past 7th October, any dialogue about a future peace and resolution will need all involved to step back from the recent bloodshed and destruction being carried out by both sides.

Unfortunately the questionable position of western governments on the destruction of Gaza is going to make it all but impossible for the UK and its allies to take any meaningful part in conflict resolution talks, having come down so firmly on one side of the conflict.

As it happens the only world leader who has consistently called for a ceasefire and for sanity to prevail is Pope Francis. At his Angelus on Sunday Francis underscored his closeness to all those suffering, Palestinians and Israelis. He said he remembers and prays for them every day, and he offers them his “embrace” at “this dark moment.” And he then made this impassioned plea: “May the weapons be stopped: they will never lead to peace, and may the conflict not widen! Enough! Enough, brothers! In Gaza, let the wounded be rescued immediately, let civilians be protected, let far more humanitarian aid be allowed to reach that stricken population. May the hostages be freed, including the elderly and children. Every human being, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, of any people or religion, every human being is sacred, is precious in the eyes of God and has the right to live in peace. Let us not lose hope: let us pray and work tirelessly so that the sense of humanity may prevail over hardness of heart.”

Again, just yesterday, in a letter ahead of the 38th diocesan World Youth Day (which will be celebrated on 26th November) he notes that we are living in a period of crisis, of war, when “for many people, including the young, hope seems absent.” Many, he says, “feel as if they are in a dark prison, where the light of the sun cannot enter.” In such situations, Pope Francis asks, “How can we experience the joy and hope of which Saint Paul speaks? When we think of human tragedies, especially the suffering of the innocent, we too can echo some of the Psalms and ask the Lord, ‘Why?’”

In truth, much of the “why” is because world leaders have long since seemed to suffer from an inexplicable reluctance to say the obvious when it comes to global conflict. Inexplicable, that is until one understands how warfare and the decimation of countries has become the most lucrative of income streams for many developed countries, and especially the UK.

Pope Francis has regularly been a vocal critic of the global arms trade. On the papal flight back from Africa in February he called it “the biggest plague” affecting the world today. He added that “it is also true that the violence is provoked” by the ready supply of weapons and that making it easier for people to kill each other just to make money “is diabolical — I have no other word for it.”

Looking each day at the terrible destruction of Gaza the connection to the wider arms trade might not seem obvious, but both sides have ready access, and are welcome customers of, the shadowy figures at the heart of a global industry that really ought to have no place in a modern society.

Since 2015 when deals were first struck, the UK has approved millions of pounds’ worth of licences for military equipment to Israeli forces, including components for F-35 fighter jets, which can deliver ground strikes and have been recently pictured in social media posts from the Israeli Air Force. For its part Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, acquires smuggled weapons from Iran and also builds them in Gaza, according to the CIA — though it’s also rumoured that many of these weapons, or at least their components, come from the UK and its allies.

Given that we have a lead from Pope Francis, the UK Catholic community ought to be far more vocal in its condemnation of arms production but — like our legislators — we also have compromises to deal with. Thankfully the Church itself has long since divested from the arms trade but many thousands of UK Catholics depend upon defence and ancillary jobs for their livelihoods. The last time this relationship was scrutinised was back in the 1990s, when British Aerospace, and in particular its Wharton, Lancashire plant was manufacturing and supplying Hawk jets to the Indonesian military, who were engaged in a brutal campaign to annihilate the (prominently Catholic) East Timorese, resulting in the deaths of more than 200,000 civilians. Numerous pacifist and other lobby groups campaigned to get the UK government to halt the sales, and the Catholic Church was also prominent in voicing its concerns.

Such confrontations seem to have faded with the decades, and these days we tend to restrict our interventions to calls for prayer and peace, when a more direct demands for people to stop killing each other and manufacturing lethal weapons and munitions could carry significant political weight — something Pope Francis clearly understands.

In 2003, as UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was swinging the country behind the US-led invasion of Iraq, Pope John Paul II used his State of the World address to try and prevent the invasion, declaring: “No to war! War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity.” He then put his Pro-Nuncio to the US on the next plane to Washington to intercede directly with George W. Bush. The invasion went ahead with all the disastrous consequences we know about, but at least the pope had tried, and the world knew the Catholic position.

Back in Gaza, the killing and the destruction goes on, while the world sits and watches and politicians make their excuses. Please God there will be some forgiveness for our inaction.

• **Joseph Kelly is a Catholic publisher and theologian** <https://www.thecatholicdirectory.co.uk/places/3138/>

LET'S RAISE OUR VOICES

I received the following message from my colleague Liz Archibald for Hexham and Newcastle diocese but these words are relevant for us all. There seems to be an increase in alarmist propaganda that only serves to stir up hatred and animosity. The references highlighted by Beverley remind us how much similarity exists between the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths – all descended from Abraham – **Ed**.

Liz writes: Please find attached a powerful call from Beverley Prevatt Goldstein asking us to reflect and act upon the comments in speeches by Suella Braverman in September and October. This is shared by the Justice and Peace network of Hexham and Newcastle. We all need to make our voices heard.

Beverley writes: Suella Braverman's speeches on September 26 and October 3, 2023, have been condemned by the United Nations Refugee Agency and challenged by politicians from every party including by her Conservative Prime Minister and by innumerable charities, including Amnesty International, Action Aid, Human Rights Watch.

Her speeches, abound in information that is both incorrect and designed to encourage fear such as 'the heightened levels of criminality connected to some small boats' arrivals; the option of moving from a poorer country to a richer one is an entirely realistic option for billions of people'. Nevertheless, misinformation that dehumanises others, particularly from a Home Secretary, not only influences public opinion but has been shown to increase hate crime towards refugees and those associated with them. Her language: a 'hurricane' of asylum seekers, 'multiculturalism has failed' the Human Rights Act should be called the Criminal Rights Act resonates with that of Enoch Powell and will become more divisive, and full of hate if left unchallenged.

All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.

We acknowledge that challenging cruelty and indifference to strangers is the duty of all and endorsed by every religion:

Christian: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Mathew 25, 31:40

Jewish: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born, Leviticus 19:33-34.

Muslim: Do good... unto the neighbour who is a stranger... the wayfarer... Surah 4:36

Pope Francis has reinforced that it is the duty of all Catholics to challenge the 'fanaticism of indifference' and the 'alarmist propaganda' being demonstrated and to follow his lead in stating that "Those who risk their lives at sea do not invade, they look for welcome, for life" (23.09.2023).

Let's all raise our voices to follow the Pope's lead, challenge alarmist propaganda and encourage others to do so too.

SABEEL-KAIROS NEWS

On Sunday 3rd December at 7pm we will host the final part of our Autumn online series 'Hope for Palestine'. Sadly we have had to change the plans for this event. Our speaker was Dr Yasser Abu Jamei from Gaza, and despite efforts to try and get in touch with him, we have not been able to confirm if he is ok. Our prayers are with him and his family.

We are pleased to be able to offer you the chance to engage with a panel discussion on the situation in Gaza, Jerusalem and the West Bank, featuring our partners Sabeel and Kairos Palestine (Omar Haramy and Rifat Kassis). We will be encouraging those attending to come prepared with questions for the panel, and speakers will share updates from the region, and how we can support Palestinians at this critical time.

This will then be followed by a short vigil for Palestine, featuring bible verses, poems, reflections and prayers. We encourage you to bring a candle to light as part of this service.

Due to the current security situation in Palestine, this session will not be recorded. Therefore we would encourage you all to come along if already registered, and if not to register here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMsdOiqrDlvHN3EpNEt82mAhUybeptGrKwh#/registration>

Please note this series was free for all Sabeel-Kairos members, and we ask for a £10 donation for non-members. We hope to see many of you there!

VINCENTIANS CALL FOR URGENT GOVERNMENT ACTION ON POVERTY

18 November 2023: Ahead of the Autumn Statement, we - a group of Vincentian organisations from across the UK - urge the government to put vulnerable people at the forefront of its spending plans. Together we support some of the most deprived and marginalised groups in our communities, and this year we have seen an alarming jump in the numbers of families and individuals suffering the depths of poverty and injustice. Children, low-income households, elderly citizens and people with disabilities need the government's urgent attention.

Children

Approximately 800,000 children in England do not qualify for free school meals despite living in poverty. A high proportion of families living in poverty are from working households, yet they are still forced to rely on food banks and charity donations for the basics to live. Every day, more and more parents come to our services desperate for assistance to feed, clothe and provide a warm home for their children. We know food insecurity and poverty can cause long-term damage to children and has been associated with chronic illness, hindered physical and cognitive development, and poor mental health in adulthood. We have also seen a frightening surge of mental health concerns from both adults and young people as anxieties around the cost-of-living continue to grow. We need an adequate social security system that at least covers life's essentials.

Homelessness

The rate of homelessness is rising steeply in this country. The number of rough sleepers in England has increased by 18% since last year, and homeless charity Depaul UK saw a staggering 30% increase in the use of its emergency accommodation service. What's more, there are around 104,510 households, including 131,370 children[v], currently living in temporary accommodation, many of which are overcrowded and unsuitable for young families. No child or adult in the UK - no matter their ethnicity or social background - should have to live in undignified conditions.

Elderly and Disabled People

The social care sector remains in a critical state, with persistently high vacancy rates and financial pressures leaving people without the care they need to live safely and well, including vulnerable older adults and people with disabilities. A recent survey by Daughters of Charity Services revealed a vast majority of the sector agrees that increased government funding is necessary to lift vital care organisations out of dire financial circumstances.

We live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet this is not a society in which many children and vulnerable citizens can live healthily, safely and thrive. Charities and communities are working overtime to provide vital services to those suffering the most, but we need national action to fix these failing systems. The government must intervene.

This Autumn budget provides an opportunity for meaningful change. We hope to see bold government moves that will protect our aging population and generations to come.

Signed: Anglican Sisters of Charity, Company of Mission Priests, Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, Daughters of Charity Services, Depaul UK, International Association of Charities (AIC), NOAH Enterprise, Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Evron, The Passage

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/search/vincentians>

SHARING STORIES

Watch Life in Stages S1 Ep3: acclaimed actors Adrian Lester and Meera Syal in conversation at the National Theatre on the NT Youtube channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hzlglqOHmc>

A fascinating insight into race and colour and being seen as 'the other' between two friends who talk about their path into acting at a time when they saw few people of colour on the TV or the stage. And a timely reminder that dialogue is the way to break down barriers and focus on what unites rather than divides.

Meera Syal reveals that she never thought she would find a place in this profession. She says, "When you grow up as 'other' and you get constantly asked or looked at as "Why are you here?" or "What brought you here?" then you really have to think about your place in the world in a way that other people don't. And the only way that I could make sense of that was to think, "It's stories. It's only through stories that you can stand in my shoes and I can stand in yours. And they're universal and they're without barrier and they're without race or class. That space, whether it's on a stage or in a book is where I can be accepted and I can feel the empathy of other people."

Adrian Lester agrees. He says, "There's so much more that connects us than that separates us."

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON KEN LOACH FILM THE OLD OAK

Fr Chris Hughes 6 October 2023

The Old Oak Directed by Ken Loach 2023

I am not a film critic. Even if I was, I would not be in a good position to offer an objective viewpoint on this film. A number of us involved in Tyne and Wear Citizens met with Ken Loach's long-term collaborator and script writer Paul Laverty, as he was wondering if they could make into a trilogy, of films set in the North-East of England. Films that brought into the open, grave injustices and unheard human misery, following on from their examinations of the dehumanising processes that lie at the heart of applying for welfare benefits in 'I, Daniel Blake' and the cost and the loss of humanity caused by the gig-economy and low pay in 'Sorry We Missed You'.

Having met Paul, I am aware he is an attentive listener with his creative mind always looking for a story that reveals uncovered trauma and tragedy, but showing the worst and best in humanity in responding to these often-unspoken realities.

It was listening to members of an Anglican parish in County Durham, how they related - how Syrian Refugees tried to make a new life in communities that had never recovered from the closing of the mines - how tensions existed between them, even though both groups were victims of grave structural injustice and violence. This narrative gave Paul the kernel of an idea that eventually flourished into The Old Oak, released on September 29th.

The film was recorded last summer and is set in the summer of 2016, which is of course the summer of the Brexit Referendum. Brexit is never mentioned but it still sets a context.

The film has many of the Ken Loach traits we are used to seeing. He uses local people, including some of my colleagues on the leadership group of Tyne and Wear Citizens. Many of the Syrians in the film are actual refugees who had to escape their homeland. Filmed on location in County Durham, the raw urban decay and sense of impoverishment that these communities still experience is brutally but not gratuitously laid bare.

Such urban decay is highlighted in the Old Oak pub, the only pub, and indeed public space, left in this nameless but typical ex-Durham mining village. The landlord, TJ Ballantyne (Dave Turner) is desperately hanging on to the pub, which is looking very sad, a ghost of its glory days when the community was thriving and standing together during the miners' strike.

I will try not to give too much away of the plot but in a chance of meeting of young Syrian woman, Yara (Ebla Mari) with a passion for photography, we have a beginning of a thread which explores how two alienated groups can discover a shared humanity and a common acknowledgment of human dignity, though forces that seek to maintain the division and mistrust are never far away.

I know some have commented on the strong language and whether that just reinforces lazy stereotypes of the north-east. I am informed that the accents are more Tyneside than County Durham but the film for me does make an important statement of essential values that are relevant for society and the Church.

The first set of values is how vital and affective solidarity, gestures of hospitality and genuine empathy and compassion are in discovering a shared humanity and transcending differences. Yara states that a friend told her that 'hope is obscene' and yet in broken communities the film shows that hope can be a tender plant if these values can allow human relationships in different and alienated groups to develop and grow.

The second lesson is the desperate need for shared spaces for such human encounters of difference to take place. We are told in the film that now the local church hall recently closed, so there are no available public spaces for people to meet. The hub of the main story line is how landlord faces rival claims to re-open a once well-used meeting room that has become dilapidated and a health and safety hazard.

It is challenging to Catholic communities as to how we make use of such spaces we own. Are they used for such encounters or just meetings of the 'Catholic tribe'?

Of course, such spaces are not just physical ones. I long realised in my ministry that we crucially need places for encounters of differences, for a shared humanity and an appreciation of our common God-given dignity to be discovered.

The reason why my introduction into community organising through Tyne and Wear Citizens, as a newly forming chapter of the Citizens UK in 2015 was so crucial, was that here was emerging a space for people across civic society to meet and to work together. Now Tyne and Wear Citizens is an alliance of about 35 institutions including mosques, schools, charities, community groups, a universities, churches and trade unions, that allow shared concerns and hope to be located across diverse groups of people. Community Organising does not have a monopoly on such spaces but it is so easy for groups in civic society to be in their own narrow furrow, so more of these inter-relational spaces are so needed.

The final reflection is that film teaches us about the need to be a synodal people! The film starts with Syrians reaching their final destination from violence ruptured land with the final image being one of a group procession. A tributary of humanity flowing into a deeper river of people in solidarity and hope. This is a film that is about peoples' transforming journey 'on the way', which is what synodality is all about!

I would imagine that it was a coincidence that the film was released just a few days before the International Synod was to start. But if you want an example of how division and tensions can be overcome by a willingness to be attentive to each other and listen to experiences of trauma, hurt and tragedy, then the Old Oak certainly fits the bill.

Therefore, if the delegates are having a difficult day at the synod, I would thoroughly recommend them to watch this powerful yet beautifully portrayed example how of synodal communities can, even in bleak situations, can discover together truth, beauty, goodness and that share in our God-given dignity that is so easily obscured and ignored. The delegates though may need some help with translation, that is from the Geordie! I am happy to help!

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48177>

• Fr Chris Hughes is parish priest of St Cuthbert's & St Joseph's, North Shields.

Watch the official trailer of The Old Oak here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fwb0c5zqsyM

<https://www.theoldoakfilm.co.uk/home/>

See also:

Film: Sorry We Missed You - www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38251

Film: I Daniel Blake - www.indcatholicnews.com/news/36293

Ken Loach movie wins ecumenical award - www.indcatholicnews.com/news/819

JRS CHRISTMAS CARD APPEAL

Jesuit Refugee Service write: - We would like to invite you to take part in this year's Christmas Card Appeal and help us to send a Christmas card and message of solidarity and support to all those supported by JRS. We hope that these messages might bring small bit of comfort, connection and encouragement at this time.

Top tips: -

1. Use a friendly, generic initial address such as 'Dear Friend'.
2. Some of those we accompany will be victims of torture or trafficking, others will have fled conflict zones or their homes to seek asylum in the UK, and all will be going through a difficult and isolating time. Your message should be one of solidarity and accompaniment for those who are going through this particularly difficult time.
3. We meet and accompany people of all faiths and none, so don't assume your card will be received by a Catholic or Christian. We advise you not to include any overtly religious messages that could be alienating to someone depending on their faith or nationality.
4. However, wishing someone a Merry Christmas or telling someone that you will remember them in your prayers is more than OK.
5. Traditional nativity scenes are quite well associated with Christmas and therefore fine however sending non-religious may be a safer option.
6. Please don't include your full name or contact details in the card.

Cards should be sent to the JRS UK offices and we will distribute them in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Please leave your Christmas card envelopes unsealed and place them in a second sealed envelope to post them to JRS UK. In order for us to distribute your card we will need to receive it by Friday 8th December.

Please send your cards to: JRS Christmas Cards 2023, JRS UK, The Hurtado Jesuit Centre, 2 Chandler Street, London, E1W 2QT.

If you have any questions or would like some more information, then please do get in touch: uk@jrs.net

"RWANDA IS SAFE": RISHI'S END-OF-PIER SHOW

Ian Linden 17/11/2023: "A completely extraordinary thing to do, to effectively overrule a decision on the facts, on the evidence, by the highest court in the land." That is Lord Sumption who served on the Supreme Court from 2012-2018 describing the Prime Minister's proposed emergency legislation on offshoring asylum processing to Rwanda.

"With our new treaty Rwanda is safe", Rishi Sunak declared responding to the Supreme Court's unanimous judgement that Rwanda is unsafe and the government policy of deporting refugees to Rwanda is therefore unlawful. Sunak's reaction to a judgement that does not please him is a demonstration of how to create Trumpian alternative facts - turn 'magical thinking' (Suella Braverman) into legislation.

The rest of the Government's response has been gaslighting as usual. Sunak took the lead prefacing Prime Minister's Question Time on 15 November by declaring "the principle of removing asylum seekers to a safe third country is lawful. There are further elements that they [the Supreme Court] want additional certainty on". So things are not what they seem: everything is under control.

But the Supreme Court was not deciding whether the general principle of moving asylum seekers to third countries was legal. The judges were hearing an appeal from Government against an existing decision of the Court of Appeal which had found outsourcing asylum processing to Rwanda unlawful. And the Prime Minister's reference to mysterious 'further elements' relates presumably to facts about the past record of the Rwandan government including their treatment of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers offshored to Rwanda by Israel between 2013 and 2018, as well as the question of past compliance with the 1951 Refugee Convention. Rwanda's asylum procedures are clearly inadequate and require a substantial transformation to ensure compliance with the Refugee Convention and other international norms.

To seek and enjoy asylum from mistreatment and persecution in another country is a human right, Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A great safeguard for refugees is the prohibition of forced return to countries where they may be subject to ill-treatment or persecution, the principle of non-refoulement. The decision taken by the Supreme Court rested on applying this principle in the light of the Rwandan government's rudimentary systems for the processing of refugees and its past record on asylum and other human rights.

The Supreme Court judges were not going to be satisfied with assurances given by the Rwandan government as had the divisional court in the UK in which legal proceedings had begun with a preliminary finding in favour of the Government. Its ruling relied on a realistic and thoroughly researched assessment of the risk of breaches of non-refoulement involving asylum seekers sent from the UK to Rwanda. In short, the Supreme Court painstakingly undertook the due diligence we might have expected from the Government before they began herding asylum seekers onto an airplane to Kigali.

The Government could have avoided lengthy and expensive legal challenges. Early in 2022, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office had advised Downing Street, on the advice of the UK High Commissioner to Burundi and Rwanda, Omar Daair OBE, not to select Rwanda as a third country. The UNHCR, with what the Supreme Court called their 'unique and unrivalled expertise', had aired their strong opposition. The killing by Rwandan police of 12 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo during a protest against poor food in 2018 should have raised serious doubts. Rishi Sunak was probably too busy in California in May 2011 to notice reports of British police warning two Rwandan dissidents of a credible threat to their lives. President Kagame's way with political opponents was hardly a secret when the 'Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership' was launched by Priti Patel in April 2022 in the face of objections not just from the political Opposition but also from her Home Office civil servants, the Churches and NGOs.

The Government's reaction to this debacle foretold, and of their own making, is disturbing. There was the usual claim that only a 'vocal minority' were rejoicing. And the worn-out refrain that the Prime Minister would courageously realise 'the will of the British people' against the naysayers. And where have we heard that before? According to James Cleverly, the new Home Secretary, this is "an incredible priority for the British people". Recently Home Secretaries have changed at least once a year. The post is now so precarious poor Mr. Cleverly, sitting next to the Prime Minister last Wednesday, showed the nervous signs of nodding-dog syndrome. In interviews he was reduced to sounding like an old-fashioned colonial officer assuring the home audience that the natives will be trained in good government double-quick, an unenviable task he shares with newly ennobled David Cameron.

What are we to make of all this? And of the waste of £140 million on a Rwanda Partnership known to be doomed to failure plus the £8 million a day spent on hotel accommodation for asylum seekers during the wait for a failed policy to be adjudicated.

The kindest interpretation is incompetence with a touch of arrogance. But when most reasonable and compassionate people who believe in policymaking based on evidence and facts tell you the Rwanda Partnership isn't going to fly, why keep trying to make it get off the ground? A less kind conclusion is that the Prime Minister's determination to send a few refugees to Rwanda has more to do with votes than lives. Perhaps he believes getting his message across, standing in front of a microphone saying what he thinks people in key marginal seats want to hear, is leadership.

If the Government goes ahead with concluding a previously prepared treaty with Rwanda, 'revisiting' "our domestic legal framework", and introducing "emergency legislation" - a seasonal mix of Götterdämmerung and Pirates of Penzance - we are in trouble. It sounds like a grave step in the long decline of Britain, driven by the extreme Right and led first by Boris Johnson. This move away from both a human rights culture and respect for the rule of law is what in any other country we would describe as undermining the foundations of democracy. We are indeed in an emergency - one needing a General Election not emergency legislation.

<https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/rwanda-is-safe-rishis-end-of-pier-show>

• **Professor Ian Linden** is Visiting Professor at St Mary's University, Strawberry Hill, London. A past director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, he was awarded a CMG for his work for human rights in 2000. He has also been an adviser on Europe and Justice and Peace issues to the Department of International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. Ian chairs a new charity for After-school schooling in Beirut for Syrian refugees and Lebanese kids in danger of dropping out partnering with CARITAS Lebanon and work on board of Las Casas Institute in Oxford with Richard Finn OP. His latest book was *Global Catholicism* published by Hurst in 2009.

BURMA: CHURCHES PROVIDE REFUGE IN NEW WAVE OF CIVIL WAR

Amy Balog 16 November 2023 **Source: ACN**

Burmese rebels have launched a fresh offensive in the civil war that broke out almost three years ago, prompting displaced civilians to seek shelter in churches. Armed insurgent groups began new manoeuvres last week, attacking Burma (Myanmar)'s ruling military junta, according to local news reports.

The latest offensive aims to support a co-ordinated military push called Operation 1027, which started in late October in Shan State, east Burma and has spread to other regions, including Chin and Kayah States, causing widespread displacement.

Regina Lynch, International Executive President of Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), said: "We heard of strong attacks in several dioceses. The recent days have seen a significant escalation in violence and displacement. An increasing number of urgent requests for prayer have been reaching us from this country in the last days."

Ms Lynch added: "Throughout the last three years of civil war, the Church has been standing by the people, who have faced the destruction of numerous places of worship and the displacement of entire villages. However, this new spiral of violence requires us with new urgency to remember our brothers and sisters in this remote and often forgotten part of the world. The suffering has reached a critical point, prompting ever more civilians to seek refuge in churches as safe havens."

She said that there have been some worrying reports "about distressing incidents within sacred compounds" and some churches have even "become zones of conflict and religious institutions have been forcibly evacuated. In different places, collateral damage to church properties has been reported, adding to the gravity of the situation."

As the situation continues to deteriorate, ACN's local partners have issued a plea for prayers. A local source told ACN: "The situation is dire, and we humbly request everyone to pray for us during these challenging times."

Ms Lynch also called for prayers for Burma. She concluded: "Among the many conflicts in the world right now, the people in [Burma] Myanmar feel left alone in the midst of their suffering, so our solidarity is a beacon of light in the darkness they are facing."

With thanks to Maria Lozano

LINK

Aid to the Church in Need: www.acnuk.org

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48501>

GREEN CHRISTIAN ASKS: 'WHERE IS THE HOPE?'

Source: Green Christian 14 November 2023

'Where IS the hope?' was the theme for Green Christian's Annual Members' Meeting held at St Andrew's Church, Waterloo, London on Saturday 11 November. Co-Chair George Dow and other board members reported on the year and led a discussion on finding hope.

Green Christian Co-Chair Deborah Tomkins said: "This was an exceptional afternoon. After concluding the business of the AMM, we became engaged in a profound discussion about the meaning of hope in a world where hope seems almost lost. Green Christians brought a thoughtful Gospel response to some of the most difficult issues in our world today. We invite others to join us in this work."

Membership continues to grow, Zoom workshops on a variety of topics have proved very successful, and five 'On The Road' events were held in Saltburn, Edinburgh, Reading, York and Dronfield last year. Green Christian is also recruiting two new part-time posts for new projects: a church project officer and a food project officer. A new online course for church leaders in local churches starts in January and a hybrid retreat is planned for September 2024.

Trustee Paul Bodenham introduced the afternoon's topic with a brief discussion of aspects of hope: hope for a particular outcome; hope in a solution, person or technology; and hope beyond all these. Delegates discussed what hope means for them at this time of climate and ecological crisis, while also considering whether hope might be active rather than passive, what qualities are needed to render hope authentic, strong, and powerful, the types of questions hope might ask, together with the qualities needed to ensure hope is grounded. Thoughtful responses included: Hope being motivated less by fear and more by love; working together with other groups, both Christian and non-Christian; a vision of the future, as in Isaiah; hope is the opposite of denial; we need to act hope into being. Delegates added that Green Christian helps by offering resources to share, workshops and courses, daily prayer guide, and uniting people with shared values.

Paul Bodenham described the new eight session online zoom course "Cloud and Fire" due to start on twice-monthly Tuesday evenings starting from 9 January. It is designed especially for clergy, lay ministers and spiritual directors, giving a safe space to confront questions such as "What does my vocation mean in the shadow of catastrophe? What new pastoral responses do people need?"

Ruth Jarman, Green Christian Information Officer, described the activities of the Engagement Group including the online talks and workshops enabling people to learn and discuss new ideas. The next two zoom workshops are: Wednesday 15 November 7pm Faith and the Economy with Professor Steve McMullen, editor of the Magazine "Faith and the Economy" and Wednesday 6 December 7pm Climate conversations with Christian psychologist John Steley on how people can hold two things together in their minds without making connections between them. With over 70% of people in the UK recognising climate disruption is for real how is it they still carry on with climate damaging behaviours?

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48484>

LINKS

Details of Cloud and Fire course: <https://borrowedtime.earth/programmes-of-mutual-support/the-cloud-and-fire-programme/>

Green Christian: www.greenchristian.org.uk

<https://greenchristian.org.uk/where-is-the-hope-report-from-gc-2023-amm/>

COLUMBANS SCHOOLS MEDIA COMPETITION: 'BIODIVERSITY MATTERS'

Closing date 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 with cash prizes for 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.

See more info here: www.columbancompetition.com/

DUBLIN ARCHBISHOP: SYNOD GIVES ME HOPE

Source: Irish Catholic Media Office, Maynooth 14 November 2023

The Archbishop of Dublin, Most Rev Dermot Farrell, gave the following Saint Mary's Pro-Cathedral, for the Feast of Saint Laurence O'Toole, patron saint of Dublin.

In celebrating the feast of the patron of our diocese, we give thanks to God for the graces bestowed on Saint Laurence O'Toole in his life, and for the gift of his witness for us today. Beyond the understandable historical patina, there is something exceptional and extraordinary in the contours of his life: Abbot of Glendalough at 25, first Irish Archbishop of Dublin in his early 30s, respected and trusted by the Irish, the Vikings and the Normans alike, a skilled mediator and peacemaker, revered by the community of Eu in Normandy where he died.

Laurence lived at a time of great social and demographic change. The established institutions of influence and authority were being radically disrupted. Clashes of language and culture were pervasive. Deeply rooted in the Gaelic tradition, Laurence is portrayed as finding the capacity to be open to encounter with the new and different. He created in his diocese a tent wide enough to accommodate differing traditions, insights and priorities.

The witness of Laurence in a time of vast change is a call to us in our time too. Laurence, and his Church, found ways to negotiate the change that they had to undertake. However, facile parallels will not bring us far; in fact, may even be counterproductive. Twelfth century Dublin is not 21st century Dublin! We cannot simply mirror the 12th century - with its medieval structures, its violence, its patriarchy, and its hierarchies. We have to do something else. Even in our weakness, we still have to act; and we have to find ways of permitting our Lord to act in us and among us.

The call of Pope Saint John XXIII that resulted in the Second Vatican Council, was a call to respond to a world that had radically changed in the preceding 100 years. Europe and the world had changed radically from the late 1840s to the late 1940s - constant social upheaval, the rise of radical revolutionary nationalism, three major wars, and the arrival of technologies promised not only prosperity but also unprecedented destruction. In his pastoral heart, Pope John knew that the Church had to respond in new ways to the changed world. The Second Vatican Council was the beginning of that response, and the response continues, and must continue, because the world and the context of the people we are called to serve, continue to change, and change profoundly.

Last month's Synod was but the most recent phase of the response that began in the Second Vatican Council. While its process has rightly emphasised the importance of listening to the voices of those not often heard in, or even repelled by Church, this is not the totality of the synodal process. Not only good theology, but also common sense, would tell us that we need to find ways of listening to the voices of all whose faith commitment is deeper - both ordained and lay, especially women, in the attempt 'to support a fruitful dialogue between the many charisms and ministries at the service of the coming of the Kingdom.'

I think the way the synodal assembly unfolded was a surprise both to the participants and to those observing. Pope Francis risked a genuinely new way, with himself listening at tables, with the inclusion of laity with voting rights, the curtailment of sensational daily communications on hot-button issues, and the constant interlacing of prayer and what the process called 'spiritual conversation' - a way of putting authentic listening into practice. It is clear there were convergences, divergences, tensions and questions. While we do not know what the Church in Dublin will look like in ten years' time, the synodal way gives me hope. In particular, I was given hope by the following:

1. The whole experience was grounded in prayer. While, all issues, including disputed ones were up for discussion, the real question was, where was the Spirit moving? Such a question cannot be answered outside of the Spirit, outside of genuine prayer-filled listening.
2. Secondly, this phase of the Synod was about how we talk to one another and perhaps more crucially how we listen to one another. As one Synod participant perceptively remarked, "the process itself [was and] is, in a sense, a laboratory to help us all learn to listen." (see Catherine Clifford in America, November 8, 2023)
3. Thirdly, the participation of all the baptised including young people and women in a way that allowed them to participate authentically in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry was labelled urgent. Significantly, this was a recommendation designated as urgent. That tells us a great deal.
4. Lastly, I was struck by how it was evident throughout the synodal discussions that doctrine was at the service of the pastoral ministry of the Church. Father Timothy Radcliffe OP, former Master of the Dominicans, captured it well: 'What will be given?' he asked, 'We wait to see what the Lord in His wisdom will give us, which will certainly not be what we expect.'

It would be easy to feel overwhelmed by the scale of the changes and challenges which we face. It is true that the model of Church with which most of us grew up, and for which we were formed, is - in one sense - collapsing around us. The demands and expectations of clergy and those in ministry continue to, while the numbers in active ministry decline. Things are changing, and while change is not uniform, and has a way to go, partnership is providing an impetus for pastoral and Church development. Parishes and partnerships are called to express community in new ways. This means listening to the people with whom we form community. We cannot hear others well, however, unless we are listening to ourselves, to our own hearts, which again brings us into an intimate dialogue with God.

Listening is at the very heart of the synodal process - listening to each other, listening to ourselves, listening to and for the Lord. That means we have to risk what Pope Francis risks: risking the move from 'top-down' communication to the communication among those who are travelling with each other on the one road, people journeying together after their Lord (Matt 4:19-20). This will bear fruit. To paraphrase Timothy Radcliffe, not the fruit we expect, but the fruit the Lord gives. Nobody knows how this will pan out, but our Lord will not be found wanting. As it says in the psalm, "he opens wide his hand, and grants the desires of all who live." (Psalm 144 (145): 16)

We know that the mission with which we are entrusted does not depend on our own capacity or worth. If it did, we would long since have succumbed to challenges without, and weaknesses within. We build on sure foundations; indeed, the cornerstone will not fail. We can see in the willingness of the three candidates offering themselves this morning for service on the path to ordination as deacons, a sign of the Spirit that moves hearts in the service of the Kingdom through ministry in the Church.

Inspired by the example of Saint Laurence and confident that the divine life which sustained him is also at work in our lives, we renew our commitment to the service of the people of this diocese, that they may recognise the hand of God at work in their lives, and the fullness of life God desires for all that He has created. Amen.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48487>

POPE'S MESSAGE TO YOUNG PEOPLE: IN DARK TIMES, HOPE

14 November 2023: In a letter ahead of the 38th diocesan World Youth Day which is celebrated on 26 November, Pope Francis describes youth as a time of "hopes and dreams", and asks how this optimism can be sustained in an increasingly crisis-ridden world. In his letter released today, entitled 'Rejoicing in Hope', Pope Francis says that Christian hope is not "facile optimism" but rather certain knowledge of God's presence among us, and proposes strategies for maintaining and sharing this positivity in dark times. 'Rejoice in Hope' is a quotation from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans.

Reflecting on the saint's words, the Pope says that "youth is a time full of hopes and dreams, stirred by the many beautiful things that enrich our lives: the splendour of God's creation, our relationships with friends and loved ones... and so many other things." However, he notes, we are living in a period of crisis, of war, when "for many people, including the young, hope seems absent." Many, he says, "feel as if they are in a dark prison, where the light of the sun cannot enter." In such situations, Pope Francis asks, "How can we experience the joy and hope of which Saint Paul speaks? When we think of human tragedies, especially the suffering of the innocent, we too can echo some of the Psalms and ask the Lord, 'Why?'"

In his letter, Pope Francis suggests two ways to maintain Christian hope in such difficult times. The first of these, he says, is to recognise that hope is not "a product of our human efforts, plans or skills." It is, rather, "born of an encounter with Christ. Christian joy comes from God himself, from our knowledge of his love for us. Christian hope is no facile optimism, no placebo for the credulous: it is the certainty, rooted in love and faith, that God never abandons us and remains faithful to his promise: 'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me.'" A second way we can maintain hope in the midst of suffering, he says, is to recognise that "we can also be part of God's answer to the problem. Created by Him in His image and likeness, we can be signs of His love, which gives rise to joy and hope even in situations that appear hopeless," he says.

Having received this joy and hope, Pope Francis says, we cannot keep it to ourselves. "Nurture the spark that has been kindled in you," he urges, "but at the same time share it. You will come to realize that it grows by being given away!" In particular, he asks, "Stay close to your friends who may be smiling on the outside but are weeping within, for lack of hope. Do not let yourselves be infected by indifference and individualism." We cannot keep our Christian hope to ourselves, "like a warm feeling", Pope Francis urges. "It is meant for everyone."

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48486>

Read the full letter here:

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/11/14/0794/01732.html#en>

MERSEYSIDE POET ROGER MCGOUGH TO READ AT PACT'S ADVENT CAROL SERVICE

One of the lovely things about preparing for Christmas is attending a 'proper' Carol Service. Pact is the national Catholic charity providing support to prisoners and their families. We are holding two Advent Carol services this year, in London and in Birmingham. Why are we doing that? What does it mean to gather and sing beautiful carols and eat mince pies together at what is for families separated by imprisonment, such a tough time.

There will be a record 100,000 children across England & Wales who go to sleep on Christmas Eve this year knowing that their mum or dad is in prison. Pact's recent 'Serving a Hidden Sentence' research heard from families about the financial and emotional challenges of having a loved one inside: "My partner is 300 miles away from us, so I have to travel a 600-mile round trip with two young children and stay overnight in hotels... It's exhausting, and financially I can't afford to do it more often. So we lose visits. Bonds are weakened because of this."

A Pact Carol Service represents an opportunity to stand in solidarity with women and men who will spend Christmas inside, and with their families. A person with lived experience of the criminal justice system will share something of their experience as an integral part of the Service. Our readings, prayers and reflections will help us prepare our hearts for Christmas in a way that 'enlarges the space in the tent' – or maybe in the stable! – to include our brothers and sisters affected by imprisonment. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reminds us that, '... we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up...'

Join us at one of our events and be part of this work for the common good.

'I was in prison and you visited me.' Matthew 25:36

London Pact Advent Carol Service 5 December 7pm

Roger McGough, presenter of BBC Radio's Poetry Please will be joining us to read his poetry. Roger was raised in the Catholic faith and was a pupil at St Mary's College in Crosby, Merseyside.

"We are delighted to announce that Roger McGough will be reading his beautiful poetry at the Carol Service," said Pact. "Roger is one of Britain's best-loved poets, presenter of BBC Radio's Poetry Please, and a good friend to Pact. His poem *Everything Touches* brought hope to people inside as part of a Pact National Prison Radio programme during the pandemic.

"At our Carol service, the choir of Sacred Heart High School, Hammersmith will lead us in song as we prepare for Christmas and bring prisoners and their families before the Lord in prayer. This is a great opportunity to hear Our Lady of Victories' fantastic Grand Organ being played too. Stay and continue the conversation over refreshments in the Hall downstairs. We look forward to meeting you in person."

There is full disabled access for this event.

Address: Our Lady of Victories, 235a Kensington High Street London Greater London W8 6SF

<https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/event/pacts-advent-carol-service-2023>

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pacts-london-advent-carol-service-2023-tickets-703168264207>

Birmingham Pact Advent Carol Service 7 December 7pm

Christmas is a tough time of year to be in prison or to have a family member in prison. Pact has been supporting people in prison and their children and families for 125 years. This very special event will take place at 7pm on Thursday 7 December 2023 and you are warmly invited to join us, in solidarity with everyone affected by imprisonment.

Fr Cecil Rogerson and Fr Gary Buckby will be presiding at the service alongside wonderful ecumenical friends. The St Brigid's School Choir will lead us in song as we prepare for Christmas and bring prisoners and their families before the Lord in prayer. Alongside readings and poems, we will be privileged to hear from someone with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

Stay and meet Pact CEO Andy Keen-Downs and members of the national and local Pact team to continue the conversation over refreshments in the Hall afterwards. We look forward to meeting you in person.

Address: Our Lady and St Brigid's Church, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 5AB

<https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/Event/pacts-birmingham-carol-service-2023>

PRISONS BISHOP: IMPRISONING UK OFFENDERS IN OTHER COUNTRIES UNDERMINES EFFORTS TO CUT CRIME

Responding to the announcement by Justice Secretary Alex Chalk that new measures will allow the Government to rent prison cells overseas to house offenders, Bishop Richard Moth, Lead Bishop for Prisons, says the move is likely to damage rehabilitation efforts and do little to reduce reoffending.

“The recent Government proposal to consider renting space in overseas prisons in response to the shortfall in prison capacity in our own country is deeply concerning. It is neither a temporary solution to a temporary challenge nor an acceptable alternative in criminal justice policy, but a reactionary response to the continuing problems of sentence inflation and prison overcrowding that have remained unaddressed and unresolved for too long.”

“Although the Government notes that similar practices already happen in a small number of other countries, the outsourcing of the imprisonment of offenders to a different jurisdiction is a failure of Government to meet the public need for effective punishment of offences and rehabilitation of offenders, and a poor reflection on the responsibilities of society as a whole.”

“This proposal is particularly worrying for its likely damage to rehabilitation efforts. As the Prison Advice and Care Trust has already noted in response to this announcement, evidence shows that prisoners who stay in touch with family are 39% less likely to reoffend. Any policy that undermines these ties, such as foreign imprisonment, only undermines any attempts to cut crime, reduce reoffending, and restore ex-offenders to healthy relationships with their communities.”

Andy Keen-Downs, CEO of Pact, the Prison Advice and Care Trust, said: “Renting prison places abroad is an indication that the capacity problem has now reached crisis point. It’s the entirely predictable culmination of years of underinvestment in our prisons, coupled with a justice system that simply locks up too many people. This is a deeply embarrassing moment for the Government and raises all sorts of questions about how our political leaders have failed to grip the challenges within our criminal justice system.”

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/prisons-bishop-imprisoning-uk-offenders-in-other-countries-undermines-efforts-to-cut-crime/>

Read Pact’s full statement here: <https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/news/pact-ceo-condemns-the-news-that-the-government-is-considering-renting-prison-places-abroad>

Read the Government press release announcing the measures, 3 October 2023 here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-prison-rental-to-ensure-public-protection>

THINKING FAITH AT BOARBANK HALL: TIME OUT FOR WORKING CATHOLICS - 2023-2024

25 October 2023: We are a group of professional Catholics who meet together on zoom and live retreats hosted by Sr Margaret Atkins, and Augustinian Sister at Boarbank Hall, Cumbria and Fr Richard Finn, a Dominican at Blackfriars, Oxford (and at times other Dominicans).

Our Thinking Faith summer weeks began for Catholic students and young professionals nearly 20 years ago. They have grown and developed into something that provides for that 'post-youth' group who are trying to live out their Catholic faith in responsible positions at work and also perhaps in their families. At the same time, a regular core of participants has developed, who meet at Boarbank for the residential summer week and keep in touch with zoom retreats in between.

We warmly welcome anyone who might enjoy either the zoom or the residential week to get in touch. You can just dip your toe in by joining either our Advent or our Lent retreat. If you are looking for friendly, fun but also serious and thoughtful support from fellow-Catholics in living out your faith in daily life, this could be for you. And you might get a week's break in Cumbria into the bargain!

For more information, contact Sr Margaret on margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk, or visit our website: www.boarbankhall.org.uk

THIS YEAR'S PROGRAMME:

Advent Zoom Retreat: 15-17 December 2023. Evening sessions only. Theme: *Comfort and Joy*

Lent Zoom Retreat: 8-10 March 2024. Evening sessions only. Theme: *Fasting and Feasting*

Summer Residential: Date 27th July - 3rd August 2024. Theme: *What Catholics Really Believe*

A week of prayer, study, conversation, walks and fun, exploring the basics of Catholic faith with the help of books by GK Chesterton and Fr Richard Conrad OP.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48326>

ADVENT RESOURCES

A series of reflections for Advent based on the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love for individual or group use: <https://jpsshrewsbury.files.wordpress.com/2023/11/advent-reflection-sheet-2023-a4-5-2.pdf>

DIARY

NOVEMBER

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21 there will be an online networking event with the National Justice and Peace network (NJPN)

This is a great opportunity to link up with people across the country to talk about justice and peace issues that concern us, listen to what is going on in other areas and perhaps make plans for joint actions. It will also be an opportunity for the national committee to learn how they can support individuals and groups in their justice and peace commitment.

To register please email Sharon Chambers, the administrator of NJPN at: ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org.uk

22 LOOKING BACK TO A YEAR WITH CHALLENGES AND JOYS 7pm-8pm Join us to hear from CAFOD Director Christine Allen and CAFOD trustees about CAFOD's challenges, joys and achievements of the past year and about our hopes for the future. <https://www.bigmarker.com/cafod/annual-review2023>

28 WHAT WE NEED TO HAPPEN AT COP28: 7pm Join us to hear from CAFOD partners and experts as we look ahead to COP28 and discuss what action we need to see at the UN climate talks. <https://www.bigmarker.com/cafod/COP28>

DECEMBER

2 Pax Christi Advent Service Church of the Holy Apostles, 47 Cumberland Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 4LY 2pm
The service will last around an hour and will be followed by our Alternative Christmas Market with Fairtrade and Palestinian goods, crafts and gifts, books, cards and refreshments. For those unable to get to London, we will be livestreaming the event and you will be able to find all the details for that livestream on our website nearer the time.

3 Positive Faith World Aids Day Online Service 5pm - 6pm <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/world-aids-day-online-service-tickets-615922941097?aff=oddttdtcreator>

15-17 Thinking Faith Advent Zoom Retreat: Evening sessions only. Theme: *Comfort and Joy For more information, contact Sr Margaret on margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk, or visit our website: www.boarbankhall.org.uk*

27 CHRISTMAS FUN RUN There are in-person events in Liverpool and Bollington (near Macclesfield), as well as an opportunity to take part wherever you are! More info and sponsor forms here: <https://cafod.org.uk/fundraise/sponsored-challenge-events/run-for-cafod/christmas-fun-run>

PEACE SUNDAY -14TH JANUARY 2024 - RESOURCES COMING SOON

In August, Pope Francis announced that his theme for next year's World Peace Day will be 'Artificial Intelligence and Peace'. We are compiling resources for parishes and supporters to help mark the day and we will be posting these out and adding them to our website later this month. Let us know if you would like a resource pack for your church or organisation or by emailing us at info@paxchristi.org.uk

● **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

DON'T MISS THE LATEST NJPN E BULLETIN WITH A WEALTH OF ARTICLES AND INFO: Download here: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-ebulletins/6699/>

● **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