

Justice and Peace

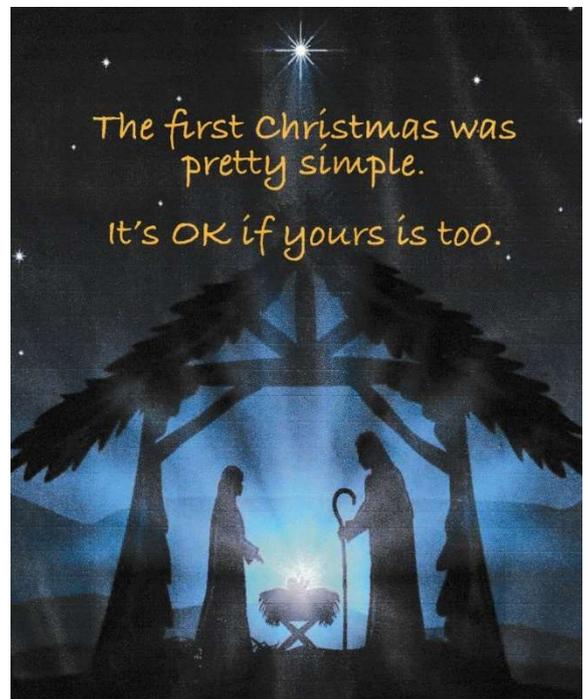
WINTER 2023 -24

Editor writes: Last year we received hand made Christmas cards from the Ukrainian children who were living with our neighbours and had become our friends. In August their mother decided they should go back to Kyiv – she was missing her husband and wanted them all to be together as a family. Their home had been destroyed by bombing but they have managed to get another smaller flat and feel reasonably safe. Israel/Gaza have taken over our news headlines but the war in Ukraine continues. . The country still needs our prayers.

In this Mouthpeace there are several things to look at or to join on line. Thank you to Sue Gubric for all the information she sends from Lancaster Diocese. She wrote: *This newsletter is becoming an amazing vehicle for our joint ecumenical work and is now being distributed far and wide!*

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The articles in MouthPeace are the views of the individual contributors or organisations concerned and do not necessarily reflect those of the Justice and Peace Commissions of the Dioceses of Lancaster and Liverpool

www.lancasterfaithandjustice.co.uk

<https://jp.liverpoolcatholic.org.uk/>

<https://jpschrewsbury.wordpress.com/>

ADVENT 2023

Sue Gubric writes: Many thanks to our Environmental Justice Lead, Dr Stephen Garsed, for providing us with four weekly reflections to think about during the season of Advent:

WEEK 1. At this time of year, magazines are full of articles on “The Perfect Christmas” encouraging us to buy exotic goods and to over-indulge. There was only one perfect Christmas - that day when God gave us his Son in an act of infinite love. This Christmas, may our greatest gift be love. Love and respect for our brothers and sisters and for all of creation with whom we share the planet, a time when we live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor, to the glory of God.

WEEK 2. When Jesus was born The Holy Family were migrants because of a census ordered by an occupying power. Two years later they were refugees in Egypt because of a king terrified of threats to his power. Today occupation, fear, violence and injustice still mar the land of his birth. May we continually pray and to speak out for justice in the Holy Land so that peace may prevail and the sons of Abraham live in harmony and have the opportunity to flourish.

WEEK 3. In his writings, Pope Francis repeatedly urges us to behave with “respect and gratitude”. Today our materialistic society has largely replaced a sense of “gratitude” by a sense of “attitude” - a feeling of arrogant entitlement that we have achieved everything by our own efforts, so we know best. How wrong we are. This Advent, let’s get back to basics and humbly acknowledge our debt to the generosity of God and, in doing so, share generously with our needy brothers and sisters.

WEEK 4. Three days before Christmas comes the shortest day of the year. The darkness and the often gloomy weather can really dampen our spirits. As individuals, we crave the light. More importantly, our world needs light and it needs it in abundance - the light of love, faith hope, joy, peace and justice. As we look forward birth of our Saviour we pray that His love will radiate within us so that we can be a sign of hope to all who are oppressed by darkness.



What’s on at Boarbank Hall in Cartmel during Advent ?

8th – 10th December 2023 Hope in Health Advent weekend Theme: Rest for your souls. For all those caring for someone, professionally or voluntarily.

15-17 December 2023. Evening sessions only Thinking Faith - Advent Zoom weekend Theme: Comfort and Joy ‘Time out for working Catholics’.

For more information or booking please contact Sister Margaret Atkins
margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk



ADVENT SERVICES (on line if you can’t get to London)



PAX CHRISTI ADVENT SERVICE Saturday 2nd December, 2.00pm

This year’s Advent Service will again be held at the Church of the Holy Apostles, Winchester Street off Lupus Street, near Pimlico Station. The service will be followed by our Alternative Christmas Market with Fairtrade and Palestinian goods, crafts and gifts, books, cards, refreshments and children’s activities.

We hope that this afternoon service will allow Pax Christi Members and friends to gather together from across the country. If you can’t get to London, do join us via the parish website <https://www.holyapostlespimlico.org/> - no need to register beforehand!

Do take a look at the Pax Christi Shop for cards, gift and books.
<https://paxchristi.org.uk/shop>



You are warmly invited to join us for
this year’s

JRS UK Advent Service

Church of the Immaculate Conception,
Farm Street
114 Mount St, London, W1K 3AH

Livestream: www.farmstreet.org.uk/livestream

Friday 15th December, 7pm

Please RSVP to Loddan Othman by 8th December,
or contact for more information:
loddan.othman@jrs.net | 07835 505382



Some advent reflections from Pax Christi

It's an unwed woman who carries God.
It's the pagans from the East who recognise God.
It's the workers from the field who hear from God.
It's the marginalised neighbourhood who welcomes God.
It's God who chooses the lowly and broken to rise.
Christmas is here. Let hope in.
Pax Christi Aotearoa (New Zealand)

More reflections :

<https://paxchristi.org.uk/advent-reflections-for-peace-makers>



ADVENT REFLECTIONS ON ZOOM MONDAYS 4th, 11th, 18th DECEMBER AT 7 PM

Our theme this year is The Light Bearers. Our weekly emails will focus on how we can reflect the love, peace and light of God in the midst of violence and darkness. We will look forward to the coming of Immanuel, God with us, remembering that the Christmas story is about the presence of God even in the midst of violence. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was born in a land under occupation and to a family who then had to flee the threat of bloodshed. He was the light in the darkness.

The Zoom link for each vigil will be included in your Advent Reflection email. Each week we will meet for 45 minutes to pray together and reflect on the word of God. We will be joined by our Middle Eastern Christian partners to hear from them on how we can best pray to help their situation. And we will spend time in quiet prayer together. To take part in our Advent Vigils, just sign up here <https://embraceme.org/advent-reflections?>

ADVENT RELECTIONS AND MUCH MORE!

Anne O'Connor writes: I have compiled a series of weekly reflections for Advent on the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love for individual or group use. See pages 15-18

Also, I've had a very fruitful dialogue over the past weeks with Michael Stewart, Education Co-ordinator at Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand (the Catholic Agency for Justice, Peace and Development in New Zealand).

Michael had searched the internet to find a Stations of the Cross to inspire young people and found one I had written for NJPN a few years ago. He told NJPN, "I'm currently developing a resource for Catholic schools, teachers and students for Lent 2024. As part of this we are creating a special Stations of the Cross liturgy for schools to use during Holy Week. We came across this attached Stations of the Cross created by Anne O'Connor from NJPN and we loved it! We thought it would be really powerful and effective for students to use. I wanted to check if you knew Anne's contact e-mail or if you were happy to give permission for us to use her first person perspectives in our resource and we would credit her work."

NJPN forwarded his request to me. I've since sent Michael several other original resources including short dramas for young people based on Gospel stories used as part of a Confirmation programme that I developed, a Confirmation Retreat session, a Creed written by two of our candidates which Bishop Brian was delighted for us to use in that year's Confirmation Service and a short story for Easter, The Prince, which I wrote a few years ago and was first published in Renew magazine."

If you would like to know more about these please contact Anne anneoc980@hotmail.com

Editor : Anne also has put together services of prayer and reflection in her parish for a few years now – for Advent, Lent and Holy Week, including a moving gathering on Good Friday evening around the Cross in the sanctuary of the church to pray for peace in Ukraine which featured a recording of a beautiful new choral piece by John Rutter composed especially for Ukraine plus a translation of a text based on Psalm 20 which the Czech people turned to when Russia invaded their nation in 1968.

St. Oscar Romero

December 3, 1978

This is what Advent is: Advent should admonish us to discover in each brother or sister that we greet, in each friend whose hand we shake, in each beggar who asks for bread, in each worker who wants to use the right to join a union, in each peasant who looks for work in the coffee groves, the face of Christ. Then it would not be possible to rob them, to cheat them, to deny them their rights. They are Christ, and whatever is done to them, Christ will take as done to himself. This is what Advent is: Christ living among us.



CAFOD's online Advent calendar of daily prayer and reflection offers an opportunity to pause, reflect, pray and take action as we prepare for Christmas. Join us as we journey through the season of Advent with our global family. <https://cafod.org.uk/pray/advent-calendar>

JOIN THE FUN!

Anyone can take part in CAFOD's Christmas Fun Run! WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 27th



Wherever you are in the country, or even the world, you can take on this festive 5km and make a difference to families fighting poverty with every step you take.

Join us in Liverpool or Bollington for our in-person fun runs. Sign-up now (below) or come along from 10am to register for an 11am start time.

Liverpool venue: Wavertree Sports Park, Wellington Road, Liverpool, L15 4LE

Email events@cafod.org.uk Mobile 07779 804242

Bollington venue: Middlewood Way (viaduct next to St Gregory's Church), Bollington, Macclesfield, SK10 5JR

Email shrewsbury@cafod.org.uk

If you're not local to Liverpool or Bollington, don't worry! You can still take part in **our virtual Christmas Fun Run**. Whether you're staying with the in-laws this Christmas, or opting for a sunnier Christmas abroad, all you need to do is lace up those trainers and tackle your own fun run locally to you.

Sign-up now, and your donation will be supporting CAFOD's work around the world.

<https://register.enthuse.com/ps/event/CAFODsChristmasFunRun>



14TH JANUARY PEACE SUNDAY 2024

Resources will be available in early December, but it's not too early to start planning what you might do in your parish to spread the message of peace and raise money to help Pax Christi in its work. If the designated date is not possible, work with the parish to find one that is. Some Pax Christi Members will be encouraging their Bishop to ensure a Peace Sunday Mass is celebrated in their Cathedral. If you help with this, let us know. The office team is always happy to help with resources and a listening ear. Do let us know what you are doing. <https://paxchristi.org.uk/>

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for 2024 is '**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PEACE**'. Edoardo Giribaldi of The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development released a statement on August 8, presenting the next Message of the World Day of Peace's theme. The press release noted the "remarkable advances made in the field of artificial intelligence" and how they "are having a rapidly increasing impact on human activity, personal and social life, politics and the economy." In this context, Pope Francis calls "for **an open dialogue** on the meaning of these new technologies, endowed with disruptive possibilities and ambivalent effects."



The Holy Father stresses the importance to be "vigilant" while working "so that a logic of violence and discrimination does not take root in the production and use of such devices, at the expense of the most fragile and excluded," as "injustice and inequalities fuel conflicts and antagonisms."

The Message will also touch on the impelling "need to orient the concept and use of artificial intelligence in a responsible way," aiming "at having it **at the service of humanity and the protection of our common home**." This will not be possible without extending "that ethical reflection" to the fields of "education and law."

The statement concluded by stating how "the protection of the dignity of the person, and concern for a fraternity effectively open to the entire human family," represent "indispensable conditions for technological development to help contribute to the promotion of justice and peace in the world."

READ ALSO Pope Francis: Technology must be at the service of humanity 20/02/2023

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-02/pope-technology-must-be-at-the-service-of-man.html>



GEOFF THOMPSON RIP

Geoff Thompson, the NJPN Administrator for the last four years, passed away on the 1st November, after a very short illness

Sue Gubric writes:

Remembering Geoff Thompson who worked tirelessly for the Lancaster Diocese Faith and Justice Commission for a number of years and who passed away on All Saints Day. Thank you, Geoff. for always acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8) May he rest in Peace and rise in glory, Amen.

There is also a lovely tribute to him in St. Wilfrid's parish newsletter : -

So sad to announce the death of Geoff on All Saints Day. Geoff edited the newsletter since we joined the parish in 2015. He chaired the Parish Council, ran the shop, organized trips to Hying and Barmouth, provided meals at the drop-in and fantastic BBQs after 10.15 Mass, and worked in olive groves in Palestine. He also was a reader and Minister of the Eucharist. But above all he was a great friend and support to many people from this parish and many other places. Rest in Peace Geoff, and as one of his friends wrote 'A wonderful addition to heaven'.



CYRIL TOWSE, RIP

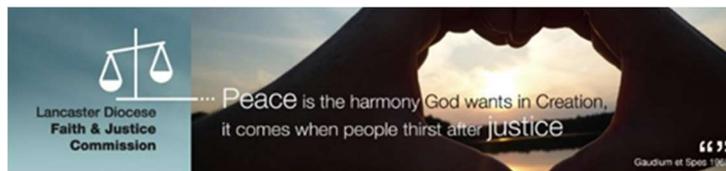
Cyril Towse died peacefully at home on October 19th

He was a long-time J&P activist in St Alban's, Macclesfield and will be remembered with great affection by all who knew him in the local area and in the wider Shrewsbury diocese.

Keith Taylor a fellow parishioner and J & P worker writes: 'What a great man. I was so fond of him. I admired him. He was a great J&P worker in our parish and he also worked very effectively at diocesan level.

Joan Sharples, former J&P Fieldworker for Shrewsbury Diocese, adds: 'What I remember most about Cyril is his charm, courtesy and the smart formality of his attire - a conventional exterior that hid his deep passion for justice and his commitment to working for God's kingdom - a kingdom of justice and peace. As member of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Shrewsbury for some years around the Millennium, he was unfailingly enthusiastic in the pursuit of its initiatives and supported and encouraged other members bringing out the best in them.'

Tony Walsh who was Chair of Shrewsbury Diocese J & P Commission for several years says ' I do remember Cyril. He was a member of the Commission when I joined and I always found him to be courteous. He was a good member of the Commission and he did have much to contribute for our gatherings at Joan Sharples or Ann Gills.



LANCASTER DIOCESE CARES FOR CREATION!

Sue Gubric writes: Lancaster Diocesan Faith & Justice Commission hosted an ecumenical 'Care of Creation' day at St Bernadette's RC church in Lancaster to mark the end of the Season of Creation. The theme of the event was 'Let Justice and Peace flow'.

Speakers included Sr Margaret Atkins who did an amazing job of outlining *Laudato Si* in relation to Catholic Social Teaching, Dr Stephen Garsed (Our Environmental Lead) who spoke about the 'War on Nature' we are currently experiencing, Dr Paul Kelly who explained the concept of 'Living Simply so others can simply live' and John Paul De Quay from the Ecological Conversion Group who led an interactive 'Let us Dream' activity to facilitate future planning within our communities.

Many thanks to all our wonderful speakers for making this day such a success, St Bernadette's Faith & Justice Group for all their support and to Canon Hugh Pollock who led us in prayer, and did a fantastic job of facilitating the day.





ST CUTHBERT'S SCHOOL IN WIGTON DARE TO DREAM!

Faith and Justice Worker, Sue Grubic, was delighted to visit St Cuthbert's school in Wigton to facilitate 'Let us Dream' workshops whereby children design and plan for a school that cares for creation. Children (and some staff!) planned for their fantasy 'green' school where Pope Francis' message of hope for young people in looking after our common home is enshrined within their everyday school life.

Here are some of their plans and a few the images of the day.

Thank you so much to all the staff and children of this amazing school!



For further information and if you are interested in your school hosting a Laudato Si 'Let us dream' workshop, please contact Sue at ldfjsue@gmail.com



LANCASHIRE SINGS CHRISTMAS is back with a fresh focus! Monday 18th December 12 noon.

We held our breath as the BBC put Local Radio in the cutting room and were wondering what would happen to our much loved Countywide Carol Service, **Lancashire Sings Christmas**. This programme will go out at a completely new time on Monday 18th December at midday live from the Blackburn Studio. We are focussing on carers at Christmas across the range of care in the community, in hospitals and hospices, care homes and those who are carers at home. The programme will also highlight aspects of social care typified by the Salvation Army and the role of local policing and other services. Holding the programme at midday will open new opportunities for those churches and groups who already hold luncheon clubs, warm hubs and spaces over lunchtime. If that's your church or group – please consider plugging the radio into the PA system and sharing in **Lancashire Sings Christmas** newly rebranded as **"Carers Sing Christmas!"** There will be all the much-loved elements of this programme with carols, the birth of Jesus and many heartwarming stories of caring at Christmas. You can download a carol sheet and a powerpoint at <https://www.ctlancashire.org.uk/lancashire-sings-christmas-in-2023/> The carols all link in with the Bethlehem Carol Sheet for those who support the charity "Embrace the Middle East". If you are holding a "Carers Sing Christmas" please email your details to Revd Anton Muller, County Ecumenical Officer at antonmuller@ctlancashire.org.uk

SPEAKING POVERTY TRUTH IN THE SOUTH LAKES

After a year of building relationships and sharing stories, members of the South Lakes Poverty Truth Commission took to the high stage of the Ladyholme Centre in Windermere, on 13 October, to share their experiences in public for the first time. Members of the 60-strong audience, made up of individuals and organisations who have supported the project so far, included elected representatives and officers from the new Westmorland & Furness Council, Bowness & Windermere, Ulverston and Kendal Town Councils and High Sheriff Sam Scott.



Interspersed with videos they had made, featuring the voices of others who could not be at the event, the Community Commissioners – from Sedbergh, Kendal, Windermere, Grange, Ulverston and Rampside – talked powerfully about the times in their lives when they had faced financial hardship and the ways in which they had felt judged, misunderstood, unsupported and stigmatized by the systems that are supposed to support them.

By sharing the truth of life on the edge in affluent South Lakeland, the Commissioners hope to inspire real change for others in similar circumstances in the future. This second phase of the two-year project, funded by W&F Council, NHS Population Health and the National Lottery, has now begun. Since the end of October the full Poverty Truth Commission, made up of 12 Community Commissioners and 12 Civic Commissioners - from the councils, the churches and services including health, housing and education – have been meeting monthly in Kendal to build new relationships ready to work together on designing better processes and changing the conversation on poverty in South Lakeland in the New Year.

For more information, contact Lois Sparling, SL PTC Coordinator, on lois.sparling@cumbriacvs.org.uk or visit the Cumbria CVS YouTube channel to watch our videos: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTuki1ob5QoLyWlma7W8tUg>



ST BERNADETTE'S CHURCH IN LANCATER PRAYS FOR PEACE

St Bernadette's Faith and Justice Group facilitated a 'Prayers for Peace' campaign at church highlighting areas of war and conflict all around the world.

The parishes of St Bernadette and St Thomas and St Elizabeth , Thurnham will be sending messages of hope to people throughout

the world who are suffering injustice, persecution or imprisonment to reassure them that we care and they are not alone. Please join them in your prayers .



NEWS FROM CHURCHES TOGETHER IN LANCASHIRE

A. Dying well

Over the last 18 months, a series of meetings have been held between leaders from faith, health and local authority sectors. The intention is to develop and build relationships between key leaders, and to explore where and how partnership working can be put into action.

The most recent of these took place in November at St Catherine's hospice, where there was a particular focus on the subject of 'Dying Well'. This is a strategic priority for the Lancashire-wide Integrated Care Partnership, but it is widely recognised that there is an important contribution which the faith sector can make here.

Conversations highlighted some key aspects and ideas

- Having a death and dying plan leads to less crisis. Death is not chaotic, but the trauma caused by unplanned death has a huge impact on community and on health professionals.
- Talking about death and the person who has died creates a sense of worth around the person's life; young people are generally better at talking about death. Some organisations are reluctant to engage for fear of "getting it wrong".
- Hospices are particularly good at responding holistically to this area of need, and have produced a number of useful resources, including: Compassionate conversations - Last days matter (St John's) - 'My wishes'
- Churches can provide accessible meeting points e.g. following discussion with staff at St Catherine's hospice, St Margaret's, Ingol has set up a bereavement café, which is being well attended.
- Faith groups can have an influence on local 'policy' by joining the community group which has a seat at the local health and wellbeing board – in Preston, this would be the Preston Community Network; in Blackburn, it would be Community CVS; in east and north Lancashire it could be the CVS.

It was also very encouraging that several people committed to taking specific actions. These included:

- At any partnership meetings at which there are no church reps, will ask for there to be one / some at subsequent meetings.
- Primary care network newsletters to feature church activities.
- Churches to be signed up for training in compassionate conversations.

The hospices in Lancashire and South Cumbria have come together to form Lancashire South Cumbria Hospices Together (LSCHT). <https://www.lsch.org.uk/>

This lists all eight adult and two children's hospices, with links to them. Approaches from local churches will be very welcome.

B. Winter warmth and welcome

As the weather becomes colder, many public buildings are again opening their doors to provide warmth and welcome. There are now several schemes involved in this provision, which can be a little confusing, so here's a simple guide.

a. The Warm Welcome Campaign has begun again. This is a seasonal campaign, delivered by Good Faith Partnership in collaboration with over 50 partners, providing Warm Welcome spaces. Organisations can register at <https://www.warmwelcome.uk/>, and so appear on the national map,

b. Lancashire County Council have a network of Warm spaces; these include all county libraries, but any other public buildings, including churches, can register – and many have. This can be done at <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/cost-of-living/warm-spaces/>

There is also a link to the map which shows the location of these warm spaces.

c. Thirdly is a long-standing scheme called Places of Welcome, a network of local community groups, especially churches, providing places where all people feel safe to connect, belong and contribute. This is managed by the Near Neighbours network.

<https://www.placesofwelcome.org.uk/>

There is no reason why a church, or community group, should not register with ALL of these schemes, as the ethos, and the criteria are essentially the same. It is widely recognised that the main reason for people coming into such places is not necessarily the need for warmth, or even food, but because they are lonely. So, a venue with a regular opening time, which is well-publicised, can make a significant contribution to combatting social isolation and loneliness.

The county council Warm spaces and the Places of Welcome both offer small grants (of up to £500) to help locations with set-up and some running costs.

Churches Together in Lancashire Working Group on Social Justice / Social Responsibility

NOVEMBER 30 – DECEMBER 12 COP 28 IN DUBAI

<https://www.cop28.com/en/>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/11/what-is-cop28-climate-change-summit/>



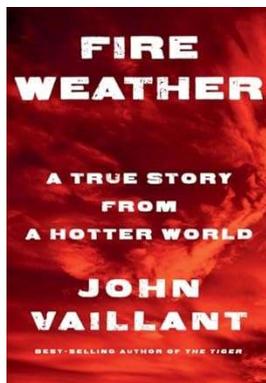
The conference may a distance away but there are plenty of ways for us to engage from our own homes. To help us participate, this **Journey to 2030 special edition** has reading, actions, and prayerful reflections. This includes material from CAFOD, the Catholic Bishop's of England and Wales and Green Christian to help us to LEARN, ACT and PRAY

<https://mailchi.mp/b7dbe9653edb/cop28?e=48b5b407ef>

At 8am every morning during COP28, from 30 Nov to 12 Dec, Green Christian are organising 10 minutes of prayer and reflection, focusing on the theme of the day. This will be on Zoom and led by our chaplain, Revd Andrew Norman.

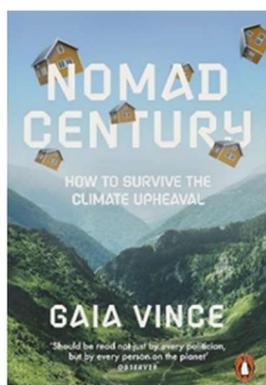
Register here: <https://greenchristian.org.uk/prayer-for-cop28/>

BOOKS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE



“Is fire alive?” the journalist and author John Vaillant asks early in his new book, “Fire Weather”. The answer seems so obvious: No. Of course not. Some 300 pages later, the question didn't feel quite so ludicrous.

Vaillant tells the story of a colossal wildfire that, in the spring of 2016, torched much of Fort McMurray, a small city carved out of central Canada's boreal forest. It is a tale of firefighters, homeowners and local authorities confronting a conflagration so intense that it generated its own weather systems, complete with hurricane-force winds and bolts of lightning. More than that, it is a real-life fable about the causes and consequences of climate change. Fort McMurray, with a population of about 90,000, was created so that energy companies could extract bitumen — a sticky black substance that can be converted into synthetic crude oil, diesel and a variety of other petroleum-based products — from the tar sands of northern Alberta.



Gaia Vince's new book, “Nomad Century”, should be read not just by every politician, but by every person on the planet, because it lays out, much more clearly than any existing scientific assessment, the world we are creating through global heating. In this new work, the author makes the pessimistic, but entirely plausible, assumption that by the end of this century the Earth will be 4 ° C warmer than during the period before industrialisation. And while this may sound like the stuff of nightmares, she also offers an optimistic vision of how humans might cope after rendering large swathes of the globe uninhabitable — through massive migration towards the poles.

In a growing zone around the equator, temperature and humidity will be so high that people will be unable to prevent themselves from overheating through sweating, making it dangerous to undertake any strenuous activity outdoors. Faced with such an inhospitable environment, Vince argues, humans will do what we have been doing throughout our evolutionary history: we will move. But this time it will be in our billions, on a scale never seen before.

ISRAEL – PALESTINE

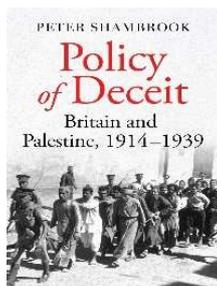
Editor : I am sure like me you have heard and read much recently some of which makes me very sad, some very angry and some hopeful.

Anne O'Connor's recent NW J & P Bulletins for November focus on the present conflict with the usual helpful wise words.

<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/category/njpn-north-west/>

Also read Pax Christi comments <https://paxchristi.org.uk/campaigns/israel-and-palestine/>

One thing that horrified me was hearing Benjamin Netanyahu when asked by journalist the weekend of the Harmas attack – 'Should you not perhaps look at the back story to help to understand?' Netanyahu stated 'There is no back story'. What about the Nabka, the 'security wall', the illegal settlements and destruction of Palestinian olive tree etc. etc. But we can go even further back.



POLICY OF DECEIT BRITAIN AND PALESTINE 1914 – 1939

Peter Shambrook looks at the simple question which causes so much anguish 'Who does Palestine belong to the Arabs or the Jews?' During World War I, the British Government made two contradictory pledges which could not be reconciled. Yet they spent the years between 1918 and 1939 conducting a deliberate 'policy of deceit' trying to do just this. Peter Shambrook concluded that the past hundred years of tension and suffering in Palestine are the result of British double dealing. 'Would it be too much' he asks 'for Britain now to take a lead and acknowledge its past and present mistakes'

Or more briefly the 18 minutes film on <https://balfourproject.org/film-of-britain-in-palestine-1917-1948/>

A very personal view point if offered below...

Frank Thompson writes:

Sorting out some ancient file boxes I came across some old Viking school magazines from the Whitby County School which my eldest sister had attended, 1934-39. (I followed her much later after World War II). As the present dreadful troubles in Israel and Gaza had just hit the headlines I was particularly interested in the following article written by a then former pupil R H Miller who must have been fortunate enough to go on a cruise. It is interesting to see how easily a visitor could travel around that region in those days. Also that there were even then, in British mandate times, Jewish fortified settlements being established in a land which was overwhelmingly an Arab country.

A PALESTINE JOURNEY – 1938

One perfect June morning I found myself in Haifa, Palestine, with a whole day to spare. Our cruise ship had arrived from Cyprus during the night, and was due to sail again at eight o'clock that evening for Alexandria. Most of the ship's passengers had gone off to visit the Sea of Galilee and Tiberius, and I found myself at a loose end as I had visited that area before and didn't feel the need of a repeat visit. Then I remembered that before leaving England I had been given the address of some people in Nablus, and I wondered if it would be at all practicable to pay these friends a surprise visit. Making some tentative enquiries on board the ship I was told that Nablus was some forty miles away. That seemed quite a reasonable distance, so I looked round for two friends to join me. They, however, had already disappeared, so I made my way down to the quayside to look for an Arab taxi driver. I was at once surrounded by a small crowd who looked—and spoke—very much like the original forty thieves from Ali Baba. There, I learned that the distance was 110 kilometres, but after the usual ten minutes' bargaining over the fare, I decided to risk the trip and engaged one, Hassan, a fine looking fellow, who turned out to be an excellent driver. Just as we were setting off I noticed my two friends from the ship on the other side of the road. After a shout from the taxi and after a little persuasion they decided to accompany me.

On leaving the town, we travelled for some thirty miles across the plain of Jezreel, under Mount Carmel. The roadside scenes were intensely interesting, and in many places the Bible seemed to come alive. There were strings of camels, with their extraordinarily musical camel bells, and their Arab driver in his burnous and flowing headdress, bound by camel hair ropes. Camels and donkeys were also working in the fields. Now and again we would pass married couples with their donkeys traveling on the road — we couldn't help noticing that the husband was always riding, his long legs almost touching the ground, while his poor wife (dressed in long, black robes) would be trudging along behind in the dust. Clearly, any husband was very much lord and master in this part of the world. There were flocks of sheep and black goats in the distance and dotted over the plain we could see

the low black tents of the Bedouins. Apart from the tarred road, the scene would probably be very much the same in Abraham's day.

Now and again we would pass new Jewish settlements and most of them were fortified behind barbed wire, but just at that time the country was quiet for the report of the Palestinian Partition Commission had not yet been issued. The Jews were making some attempt at tilling the land, but there were no hedges or fields, very few trees, and all the land looked arid, dry and parched from lack of rain. Once we came across a wayside well. Around it were a party of Arab farmers with their camels and donkeys. They had with them a cart, on which were several empty oil drums where we might have expected earthen ware jars to carry the water to their farms. "Was water that scarce?" I asked myself.

Our first halt was at Jenin, where we stopped for petrol, and then we got into the hills, for Palestine is a very hilly country. Once we were stopped by a young policeman in a grey uniform, carrying a rifle on his shoulder. He wanted to see Hassan's licence, and he spoke in a broad Scottish accent, but he grinned very cheerfully when he heard us chatting between ourselves in English. The police post was a small hut set some distance from the road. At times we passed the railway - a narrow gauge, with a train perhaps once a day—or even once a week. The road frequently ran through narrow gorges, or up and down steep hillsides, and it was almost impossible to see the small villages until we were right on top of them. Occasionally, however, we would see a small cluster of huts built on the tops of the smaller hills. We passed the ruins of ancient Samaria, and after being on the road for about two hours we entered a wide gorge, and arrived at Nablus, which is quite a large town. This was the Shechem of the Bible, and here to-day there still live the remnants of the Samaritan race.

We threaded our way through the narrow streets, strangers in a very strange land, and we made enquiries for our friends' address. The house was high up on the hillside, but Hassan, without turning a hair, took the car up a road of sorts, and we went up to the house and rang the bell. This was answered by a tall, dark skinned gentleman in a long striped nightshirt. Then rather in the Stanley manner we introduced ourselves. We stayed for a couple of hours, during which we learned many things about the country and its people, and left again soon after lunch.

Back in the taxi we picked up the Jenin road which headed north out of Nablus. On the outskirts of town was Joseph's well. A young medical officer once examined the water from this well, and, horrified at the result of his analysis, he promptly condemned it. This caused such an outcry among the natives that there was nothing for it but to lift the ban. After all, it was their well, had been used since the time of Joseph, and no doubt the germs were friendly!

After Jenin, we made a detour in order to visit Nazareth. The way lay through a wide cultivated plain, inhabited mostly by Jewish settlers. Hassan took us up the side of a mountain by a steep, winding road, and eventually we stopped on a hillside over-looking the town. Instinctively the three of us had a curious feeling that we were transported back in time and witnessing scenes from Our Lord's childhood nearly two thousand years ago. We went into the town, and even the touts, postcard sellers and beggars could not rob us of our feelings that we were in one of the world's most Holy places.

Modern Nazareth is an Arab town of about 12,000 inhabitants. With its inns, its wells, its narrow streets, it has changed little over

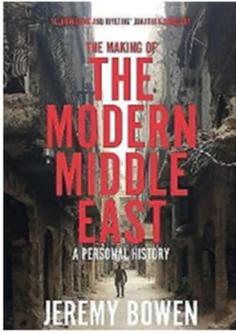
those two thousand years. But time was pressing, and we did not want our ship to leave us behind, so we quickly covered the twenty miles back to Haifa. We went on board and, soon afterwards, slipped gently out of the harbor into the gathering darkness of the Mediterranean.

Postscript

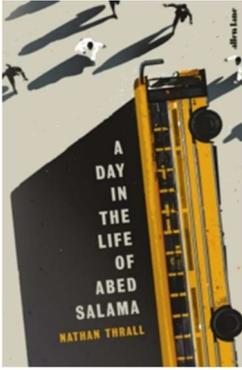
On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. U.S. President Harry S. Truman recognized the new nation on the same day.



More recent view points:

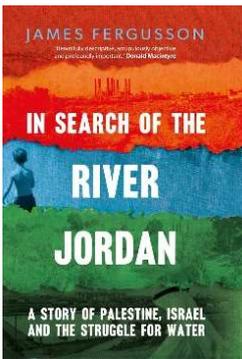


Jeremy Bowen, the International Editor of the BBC, has been covering the Middle East since 1989. In this book he takes us on a journey across the Middle East and through its history. He meets ordinary men and women on the front line, their leaders, whether brutal or benign, and he explores the power games that have so often wreaked devastation on civilian populations as those leaders, whatever their motives, jostle for political, religious and economic control. Clear throughout is Bowen's deep understanding of the political, cultural and religious differences between countries as diverse as Erdogan's Turkey, Assad's Syria, Netanyahu's Israel and Palestine, whether Hamas-controlled Gaza or the West Bank.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ABED SALAMA reads like a novel but it is sadly true. It tells a deeply moving story about one tragic road accident, which illuminates the tragedy of the millions of Palestinians who live under Israeli Occupation. It is a story of one heartbreaking day in Palestine that reveals lives, loves, enmities, and histories in violent collision. Milad is five years old and excited for his school trip to a theme park on the outskirts of Jerusalem, but tragedy awaits: his bus is involved in a horrific accident. His father, Abed, rushes to the chaotic site, only to find Milad has already been taken away. Abed sets off on a journey to learn Milad's fate, navigating a maze of physical, emotional, and bureaucratic obstacles he must face as a Palestinian.

Interwoven with Abed's odyssey are the stories of Jewish and Palestinian characters whose lives and pasts unexpectedly converge: a kindergarten teacher and a mechanic who rescue children from the burning bus; an Israeli army commander and a Palestinian official who confront the aftermath at the scene of the crash; a settler paramedic; ultra-Orthodox emergency service workers; and two mothers who each hope to claim one severely injured boy.



This recently published book by James Fergusson covers 1600 km in a search for underground hydrogeological facts while keeping his eyes open for realities on the surface. This means he encounters injustice and nationalism wherever he turns. His book, part travelogue, part an appeal for enlightened self-interest, is full of odd and surprising realities: He introduces an abundance of larger-than-life characters with more than one side to them — from grizzled Israeli farmer-pioneers from the 1950s to gung-ho, hi-tech desalinators, to a nudist hippie colony on the Dead Sea to suspicious settlers on usurped land. The Palestinians he meets are not all downtrodden but most are bitter about their loss of water, farm-land and basic rights under the more than 50 year occupation

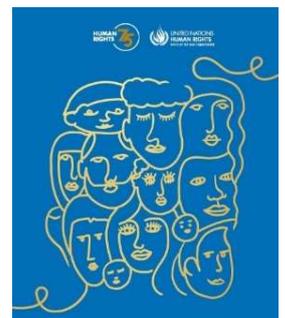
You can find out more about the book in this interview with James on a webinar organised by the Balfour Project at the end of November <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdHkyqScm4Q>

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY DECEMBER 10

We will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a milestone celebration called Human Rights 75 (HR 75). This coincides with the 30th anniversary of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

For 75 years, the core ambition of the Declaration has been to infuse societies with equality, fundamental freedoms and justice. It enshrines the rights of all human beings and is a global blueprint for international, national, and local laws and policies and a bedrock of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Human Rights Day will capture all the moments from this year's commemoration and seeks to increase knowledge on the universality and indivisibility of human rights, especially among young people, to inspire people to create a movement of shared humanity while empowering them to fight for their rights and take action. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights-75>



Amnesty International are people from across the world standing up for humanity and human rights. See <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-for-rights>

SEND A CARD THIS CHRISTMAS

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE invite us to help them to send a Christmas card and message of solidarity and support to all those supported by JRS. They hope that these messages might bring a small bit of comfort, connection and encouragement at this time. Some helpful guidelines:

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 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, The Hurtado Jesuit Centre, 2 Chandler Street, London, E1W 2QT 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.**



WRITE TO POLITICAL PRISONERS IN JAIL

As Christmas approaches, thousands of political prisoners remain in Burma's jails. They won't be able to spend Christmas in their own home with their families. Many political prisoners are young people who courageously stood up against the military coup. While we campaign for their release, we can also do something else to help political prisoners.



Letters and cards are the only way for political prisoners to stay connected with the outside world, and greatly encourage those living in harsh prison conditions. Political prisoners have told us how much it means to receive a card from someone in another country, knowing that someone cares and the world has not forgotten what is going on in Burma.

Please add a political prisoner to your Christmas card list to let them know that they are not forgotten this Christmas.

<https://burmacampaign.org.uk/take-action/free-all-political-prisoners/free-burmas-political-prisoners/>

These are just a few you can choose to send to .

Left to right: Reverend Hkalam Samson is the Chairman of the Kachin National Consultative Assembly and is a prominent and outspoken Christian leader in Burma. He is also a well-respected community leader and the former President of the Kachin Baptist Convention.

Justin Min Hein is a chairman of the LGBT Union Mandalay. He is a prominent young leader who has campaigned for LGBT rights in Burma.

Nu Nu Aung, Khet Khet Aung and Myat Thu are members of 88 Generation Peace and Open Society in Burma. 88 Generation Peace and Open Society is a political organisation and was formed by student leaders who led the 1988 uprising.



Give, act and pray as part of the movement to end UK poverty. The ongoing cost-of-living emergency is driving more and more people into poverty. As a General Election approaches, we urgently need our politicians to take action to tackle UK poverty. Let's explore our dreams of a better world – and work together to turn them into reality. Church Action on Poverty offer free worship resources to reflect and pray for change, and raise funds to enable more people like Ashleigh to speak truth to power. Sign up <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday/>



Our next FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT will be from Monday 9 September – Sunday 22 September 2024.

2024 will be our big 'three-oh' birthday, so we want to use the occasion to highlight how 30 years of working together has made the FAIRTRADE Mark a leader of life-changing impact for farmers and workers across the world.

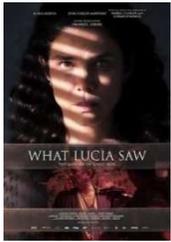
So, next year we're going to shake things up a little bit!

The headline news is that our Fairtrade Fortnight 2024 will be moving to September as part of our year-long milestone celebrations. This will give us more time to make the most of the activities and awareness around the campaign. Throughout 2024, there will be lots of opportunities to get involved with our activities.

We know you'll want to join us in celebrating the significant impact that the FAIRTRADE Mark has had in the world, and thank you for all your incredible support and contributions.

Read more about this planned change <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get-involved/Current-campaigns/Fairtrade-Fortnight-/>

WHAT LUCIA SAW A Dramatic Film of Martyrdom in El Salvador



Thursday, November 16th, marked the 34th anniversary of the martyrdom in San Salvador of six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper and daughter. In 1989, amidst a long and bloody civil war, Ignacio Ellacuría SJ and his colleagues worked tirelessly to secure a negotiated peace. Targeted by the Salvadoran military High Command, they were brutally assassinated in their university residence. The sole witness to the event, Lucia Cerna, was subsequently kidnapped by the CIA and FBI.

The film, 'What Lucia Saw', is an excellent factual dramatization of the killings and the disturbing aftermath in the United States. It can be viewed, exclusively and free of charge, on the Archbishop Romero Trust website - www.romerotrusted.org.uk/news/dramatic-film-martyrdom-el-salvador

It is a Spanish production with English subtitles, and it lasts for 103 minutes. The six Jesuits and their women co-workers are amongst 47 proposed martyrs brought together in a collective Cause for Beatification expected to be formally launched in 2024. Those who were slaughtered that night were: -

Ignacio Ellacuría, aged 59, was Rector of the university, political scientist extraordinaire, distinguished liberation theologian, brilliant philosopher and a leading exponent of Xavier Zubiri's work.

Ignacio Martín-Baró, aged 47, was Vice Rector, distinguished social psychologist focused on human rights and mental health.

Segundo Montes, aged 56, was Director of the Human Rights Institute of the University (IDHUCA), which meticulously documented human rights abuses. His focus was on the extraordinarily vulnerable internal refugees and people displaced by the fighting.

Juan Ramon Moreno, aged 56, was a renowned writer, guide and promoter of Ignatian spirituality, librarian of the Romero Centre at the university, and Province Secretary and the Province archivist..

Amando López, aged 53, was a lecturer in theology and philosophy and university administrator.

Joaquín López y López, aged 71, was Director of 'Fe y Alegría' a movement for basic education and social development whose activities are directed to the most impoverished and excluded sectors of Salvadoran society.

Julia Elba Ramos, aged 42, was housekeeper/cook to the Jesuit community

Celina Ramos, aged 16, was the daughter of Julia Elba.

DIARY

NOVEMBER 30 – DECEMBER 12 COP 28 in Dubai

8 am every morning Green Christian 10 minutes prayer time page 8

DECEMBER

Saturday 2 **PAX CHRISTI ADVENT SERVICE** 2.00pm Church of Holy Apostles London and on zoom page 2

Monday 4 **ADVENT REFLECTION ON ZOOM** 7 pm Embrace the Middle East page 3

Friday- Sunday 8-10 **HOPE IN HEALTH** Boarbank Hall Cartmel Page 2

Sunday 10 **DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DAY** Page 11

Monday 11 **ADVENT REFLECTION ON ZOOM** 7 pm Embrace the Middle East page 3

Friday 15 **JRS ADVENT SERVICE** 7 pm Church of Immaculate Conception Farm Street London and Livestream Page 2

Friday 15 – Sunday 17 **THINKING FAITH** evening sessions on zoom from Boarbank Hall Cartmel Page 2

Monday 18 **CARERS SING CHRISTMAS** formerly 'Lancashire Sings Christmas' 12 noon page 6

Monday 18 **ADVENT REFLECTION ON ZOOM** 7 pm Embrace the Middle East page 3

Wednesday 27 **CAFOD FUN RUN** Bollington and Wavertree 11 am start Page 4

JANUARY

14 **PEACE SUNDAY** Theme Artificial Intelligence and Peace Page 4

18 – 25 **WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY** Theme 'Go and do likewise' <https://ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2024/>

Friday 19 **CAFOD QUIZ NIGHT** at Our Lady's Parish Centre, Ellesmere Port Town Centre at 7.30 pm . Entrance is £3 for adults and £1 for children and the usual raffle will take place with good prizes. Refreshments will be available at the interval. All proceeds will go towards Cafod's latest development project. Contact Tony Walsh on 0151 355 6419

FEBRUARY

Sunday 11 **CHURCH ACTION ON POVERTY** <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday/> Page

Friday 16 **CAFOD QUIZ NIGHT** at Our Lady's Parish Centre, Ellesmere Port Town Centre at 7.30 pm .See January 19

Saturday 24 **NJPN OPEN NETWORKING DAY** online

MARCH

Friday 1 **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER** prepared by the women of Palestine. Theme 'I beg you. Bear with one another with love' <https://www.wwdp.org.uk/2024-theme-and-country-palestine/>

Friday 15 **CAFOD QUIZ NIGHT** at Our Lady's Parish Centre, Ellesmere Port Town Centre at 7.30 pm .See January 19

ADVANCE NOTICE:

May 13 NJPN OPEN MEETING AND AGM in London

July 19 -21 Annual NJPN Conference at The Hayes Conference Centre, Derbyshire. Theme: 'Truth and Integrity in politics'

Thank you to the following helpful websites:

National Justice and Peace Network <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/>

NW NJPN Bulletin produced by Anne O'Connor <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/category/njpn-northwest/>

ICN Independent Catholic News <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/>

ADVENT REFLECTION – WEEK ONE: HOPE

God by calling you has joined you to His Son, Jesus Christ, and God is faithful. 1 Corinthians 1:9

WAITING AND WATCHING

Advent is about two comings. It's about waiting and watching for the coming of the Christ child – new life, new birth, new hope coming into our world and into our lives. It is the fulfilment of God's promises. But it's also about waiting and watching for the end times when the fullness of God's kingdom will be revealed. Both these advents signify the coming together of humanity and divinity.

Advent is a time when the Church stands up in the face of the busyness of life and asks us to slow down, be still, and be quiet. We are to keep awake, looking and listening for the God who is always coming to us. We are called to prepare the way of the Lord. We watch and reflect on who we are. We live with expectancy and anticipation of God's presence in our lives. We wait for the angelic messenger that promises us that the womb of our humanity will bear a child named Jesus.

Advent reminds us that waiting and watching are holy work. So how do we do this? Silence is the key. Silence is a way of waiting, a way of watching, and a way of listening to what is going on within and around us. We come to self-knowledge through stillness and silence, through attentiveness and watchfulness.

© Michael K Marsh *Interrupting the Silence*

SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

In our busy, stressful world, we have to seek out silence and stillness consciously. God speaks in all sorts of ways – through scripture, through nature, through other people. However, unless we slow down and listen, we miss his promptings and his voice. Only then can we truly appreciate the value of the journey, as well as the destination; the value of slowing down, looking and listening; learning from the rhythms of nature; from the formation of community along the way, and from times of stillness and rest.

So often we rush through life at breakneck speed, never pausing to reflect and be still. It is only when we slow down and look that we really see. By slowing down, and being more present to each moment, all sorts of lessons are learned. For some, this might involve the healing of painful memories. For others, it could be time to discern the next stage in life. For many, it is a chance to really get away and listen to God. For me, it is an invitation to a whole way of being – one that recognises that God is not 'out there' to be sought, but already 'in here' to be found.

Annie O'Connor *The Camino: Finding Stillness and Presence*, 2019

THE ECLIPSE

I stood out in the open cold to see the essence of the eclipse which was its perfect darkness. I stood in the cold on the porch and could not think of anything so perfect as man's hope of light in the face of darkness.

Richard Eberhart

IT IS ENOUGH TO LISTEN TO THE SILENCE

It is enough to listen to the silence.

Silence comes to fetch us where we have just been with our thoughts and feelings.

It is enough to listen to the silence.

Silence brings us to where we are now, right here, into this room, to this place, this morning.

It is enough to listen to the silence.

Silence embraces what wants to become.

Whatever this day brings us, is held, and always has been, in this silence now.

It is enough to listen to the silence.

Silvia Ostertag *Living Silence*

A SEASON OF ANTICIPATION AND SURPRISES

Advent is a season of anticipation, of holy waiting. It is a waiting characterized not by idleness or even contented peace, but by prophetic yielded-ness and active hope. Perhaps more than any other season in the Christian calendar, Advent acknowledges the already-and-not-yet nature of the Kingdom of God. In remembering the anticipation of Christ's first coming, we acknowledge and nurture our anticipation of Christ's second coming.

Advent is a season for the prophets, for the dreamers, for the poets. A great light has shown, but there is still so much darkness to pierce, so much gloom to overcome. Advent is a season of surprises too, of God showing up when and where we least expect Emmanuel: in a womb, in a barn, at a homeless shelter, at that church service you resisted attending, in that family member with whom you disagree, in every corner of this world, to your kitchen. It is a season to slow down and pay attention, to listen to the prophets, to look for God in his many disguises.

Rachel Held Evans

THE IN-BETWEEN TIMES

Advent is about the in-between times and Advent is where God will meet us. We have on one hand, a world in disarray and it doesn't seem like there is much hope. On the other hand, we have a vision of something better.

That's the struggle of Advent. A new born baby in a stable announcing: 'Peace on earth' or a man on a cross crying: 'Forgive them, Father'. It is a bridge. The Jesus who does not solve all the problems or remove all the pain and suffering, but who says that fear can be met with faith and that history and hope do rhyme.

ADVENT REFLECTION – WEEK TWO: PEACE

He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms. Isaiah 40:10

THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

Advent is a season of waiting. The leaves have all fallen; the weather is cold, the trees are barren. It is a good time to remember the Holy Spirit moving across the waters at the moment of creation, being breathed into Adam's inert clay, coming upon Mary in Nazareth, entering our own lives in conception and baptism. We are all called to conceive God's Child in this world; this is our vocation as Christians. May we all find strength in the memories of those who have come before us, and in the companionship of those with us, offering us, in this time of waiting, the taste of liberation made possible in the birth of a child.

Sabra McKenzie-Hamilton *Catholic Worker* December 1996

A NEW HOPE

Advent invites new hope for a world in despair, light for a world in darkness, and peace for a world at war. It calls us to prepare anew for the coming of the God of peace and God's reign of peace on earth. May this holy season, give us new hope and inspire us to show ourselves to be "children of God" seeking to make peace in the workplace, in the community, in our homes, and in the world.

Heather Kiernan

HOLY PAUSING

In the monastic tradition, *statio* is the practice of stopping one thing before beginning another, acknowledging that in the space of transition and threshold is a sacred dimension, a holy pause full of possibility. This place between is a place of stillness, where we let go of what came before and prepare ourselves to enter fully into what comes next. When we pause between activities or spaces or moments in our days, we open ourselves to the possibility of discovering a new kind of presence to the darkness of in-between times. When we rush from one thing to another, we skim over the surface of life, losing the sacred attentiveness that brings forth revelations in the most ordinary of moments.

Statio calls us to a sense of reverence for slowness, for mindfulness, and for the fertile dark spaces between our goals where we can pause and centre ourselves, and listen. We can open up a space within for God to work. We can find thresholds, physical places of transition, in our everyday lives, and we can use them for our spiritual practice. In the days ahead, become aware of all the times you cross a threshold. This might be moving from one space to another — entering through a doorway, transitioning from one activity to the next, or tending the thresholds of the day, especially at dawn and dusk. Pause at each one and offer a short blessing, simply becoming aware of the possibilities alive in the moment. See if the threshold helps call forth the thinness of this moment, making the voice of the divine more accessible.

Christine Valters Paintner *The Soul's Slow Ripening: 12 Celtic Practices for Seeking the Sacred*

Reflections compiled by Anne O'Connor 2023

BLESSING THE DOOR

First let us say a blessing upon all who have entered here before us.

You can see the sign of their passage by the worn place on the doorframe as they walked through, the smooth sill of the threshold where they crossed.

Press your ear to the door for a moment before you enter and you will hear their voices murmuring words you cannot quite make out but know are full of welcome.

On the other side these ones who wait – for you, if you do not know by now – understand what a blessing can do how it appears like nothing you expected; how it arrives as visitor, outrageous invitation, child; how it takes the form of angel or dream; how it comes in words like '*How can this be?*' and '*lifted up the lowly*'; how it sounds like '*in the wilderness prepare the way*'.

Those who wait for you know how the mark of a true blessing is that it will take you where you did not think to go.

Once through this door there will be more: more doors, more blessings, more who watch and wait for you, but here at this door of beginning the blessings cannot be said without you. So lay your palm against the frame that those before you touched, place your feet where others paused in this entryway. Say the thing that you most need and the door will open wide. And by this word the door is blessed and by this word the blessing is begun from which door by door all the rest will come.

Jan Richardson *Through the Advent Door: Entering a Contemplative Christmas*

SOWING SEEDS OF LOVE AND PEACE

Did I offer peace today?
Did I bring a smile to someone's face?
Did I say words of healing?
Did I let go of my anger and resentment?
Did I forgive?
Did I love?

These are the real questions. I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will be many fruits, here in this world and the life to come.

Henri Nouwen

ADVENT REFLECTION – WEEK THREE: JOY

I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. Isaiah 61:10

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

In recent weeks I've been reflecting on how Jesus' coming into the world teaches us about presence, and how Jesus is the presence of the Father, God-with-us.

One of the Hebrew words translated as '*presence*' in the Old Testament is '*paniyim*', which can also be translated as '*face*'. I love this, because it reveals something of the nearness of God's presence and the close, personal encounter we can have with God face-to-face. As Psalm 67:1 tells us, to experience God's presence is to experience the light in God's shining face.

'*Present*' is one of those wonderfully rich words that can have all sorts of meanings. When we think of Christmas presents, we think of gifts; Jesus certainly is the self-gift of the Father to the world. But to be present also means to be here, to be near, to turn up, to exist in this moment, now, to be accessible. Isn't it wonderful that Jesus' coming means all these things as well?

When I look at Jesus' life and ministry, I'm struck by how totally present he was to everyone and in everything. Whether in prayer to the Father, in conversation with the people he encountered, in proclaiming the kingdom, in ministering to people's needs, in listening to their concerns, in suffering, in dying and in rising, Jesus was fully present in each particular moment.

I wonder if this Christmas we can practise being fully present in this particular moment, to these particular people in this particular place, without thinking of what comes next? Can we accept this moment as a gift from God, to be lived to the full?

Annie O'Connor Church Army, 2018

PRAYER

In times of despair,
we seek comfort in your presence.
We wait in hope for you.

Come, Lord, source of joy.
Move us to be good news in our world
and to stand alongside
our sisters and brothers in need.

Come, Lord, source of joy.
Lead us in your ways
as together we make a change
so all people may rejoice and be glad.
Come, Lord, source of joy.

CAFOD Advent prayers

REFLECTION

Jesus is born into poverty – into a poor family seeking refuge. The well-known imagery of the cosy straw and the welcoming animals of our nativity scenes show the joy of the Holy Family in the birth of a precious child.

But maybe those images gloss over the reality of the situation, hiding the fear of the family and the discomfort, the smells, the unpleasantness of giving birth in an animal shed.

Do we also gloss over that line of bringing Good News to the poor? This coming year, could we spend some more time working out what that could mean to our parish?

CAFOD

SEEKING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness,
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for
Christmas.

We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces
to hear your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things
look forward to your coming among us.
We who are blessed in so many ways
long for the complete joy of your kingdom.
We whose hearts are heavy
seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness,
yet seeking the light.
To you we say, 'Come Lord Jesus!'

Henri Nouwen

CHOOSE JOY

Joy is essential to the spiritual life. Whatever we may think of or say about God, when we are not joyful, our thoughts and words cannot bear fruit. Jesus reveals to us God's love so that his joy may become ours and that our joy may become complete.

Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death – can take that love away. Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God's love for us.

Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us.

Henri Nouwen

ADVENT REFLECTION – WEEK FOUR: LOVE

"I am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary, "let what you have said be done to me." Luke 1:38

BE AWAKE

The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus* meaning arrival, "coming." But if God has already come to us, what are we waiting for? If God has already become incarnate in Jesus, what are we waiting for? I think we're called to awaken to what's already in our midst. Advent is a coming to a new consciousness of God, already loving us into something new, into something more whole. We can think of Advent as God waiting for us to wake up!

Consider this: what if we are in the manger and God is already awakened in our midst and we're so fallen asleep, so unconsciously asleep that God is looking for "someone to get up and help bring the gifts into the world?" Let's awaken to what God is doing in us and what God is seeking to become in us.

Sr Ilia Delio *Moving Onwards Forward: An Advent message*

WE ARE CALLED TO BRING GOOD NEWS

John the Baptist was an evangelist. Many thought that he was the promised Messiah but his mission was only to announce the Good News, preparing the way for Jesus' coming.

I wonder how we might answer the question 'who is an evangelist?' – in a way that word tells us a little more... Let's start with some Greek! We get the English word *evangelist* from the Greek noun *euangelistes*, which means 'bringer of good tidings,' or 'announcer of good news.' You might spot the word *angel* in the middle of the English and the Greek, and you'd be right to make this connection.

An angel is a messenger and the message is good; (*eu* is the Greek word for 'good'). So, the evangelist is one who, like the angels, brings a message of good news from God. And I think we can understand something of the evangelist's message by looking at the message of the angels in the New Testament.

What is their message? Nothing less than the infinite God of love come down, God-with-us, peace on earth, joy to all, reconciliation, new life. There is a broad sense, then, in which all Christians are called to be evangelists. We are all called to speak, live and act in ways that bring this good news of God-with-us to those we meet. We are all messengers of glad tidings.

Annie O'Connor Church Army, October 2019

THE EYES OF LOVE

It is only with the eyes of love that we'll see His coming
.... Love is our awareness of God's coming in someone else.

Ralph Morton *Growing Hope*

GOD OUR HOPE AND OUR DESIRE

God our hope and our desire, we wait for your coming
as a woman longs for the birth, the exile for her home, the lover
for the touch of his beloved, and the humble poor for justice.

Janet Morley

LET YOUR GOD LOVE YOU

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone, empty before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God Look upon you.
That is all.
God knows and understands.
God loves you with an enormous love,
wanting only to look upon you with love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.
Let your God Love you.

Edwina Gateley from *There Was No Path So I Trod One*

THE SILENCE OF LOVE

Be still and know.
Be still and look.
Let the eyes of the mind be closed
that you may hear what otherwise
you would not hear, that you may know
what otherwise you would not know.

Abandon yourself to God in longing love,
simply, holding on to nothing but God.
So you may enter the silence of eternity
and know the union of yourself with God.

And if in the silence God does not
answer, God is still there.
God's silence is the silence of love.
Wait then in patience and in submission.
It is good to wait in silence for God's
coming.

Author unknown

THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are
home,
When the shepherds are back with their
flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace amongst people,
To make music in the heart.



Howard Thurman