

NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin January 2024

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

AFTER US AND UK ATTACKS ON YEMEN, ARE WE ON THE VERGE OF WALKING INTO YET ANOTHER WAR?

12 January 2024 **Joseph Kelly writes:**

It seems a dreadful irony that instead of writing about this coming weekend's Peace Sunday, we're all having to reflect on pivotal events of the past 24 hours that have driven the UK to the brink of war. Indeed, many are saying it has already been declared.

The overnight air strikes on some 16 Houthi positions in Yemen have been hailed as largely successful, with a minimum of civilian casualties expected. Command centres, munitions depots and air defence installations were among the targets that were hit by US and UK war planes in a bid to hamper the Houthis' ability to harass commercial shipping passing through the critically-important Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea. With the threat of Houthi attacks hanging over them, global container ships have already started re-routing around the Cape of Good Hope in recent weeks, adding an extra 3,500 miles, eight days and significant extra costs to the journey that a vast range of goods and resources are having to make to reach their European markets.

The options to prevent this random threat to the free flow of international commerce were always going to be limited, especially with Western economies unwilling to take any kind of hit to their prices and supply chain logistics at a time when fiscal recovery is already faltering badly.

If one looks at the sequence of events of the past few weeks – random but increasing frequent Houthi attacks, the deployment of US and British sea forces, threats and counter threats, and then the inevitable military action – one sees a depressingly familiar scenario being acted out. It's as if legislators and diplomats are incapable of formulating and enacting strategies that lead anywhere except to war as the sole solution for resolving human differences.

The public presentation of such scenarios is also depressingly familiar – the gradual or sudden emergence of an uncontrollable and irrational group of foreigners allegedly intent on completely irrational destruction, the efforts and inevitable failure of reason and 'civilised' diplomacy, and the then seemingly reluctant resort to killing as the only route to sanity and the restoration of the status quo. It's a strategy based on the false premise that 'our way of life' and our ordering the world is not only somehow superior to other narratives, but is the only permissible route to living a civilised and peaceful life. Whilst democratic Westernism may seem perfectly reasonable and logical to us, things (and human aspirations) look very different when viewed from other global perspectives, and our failure to recognise this has been the root cause of the most modern conflicts we've dragged ourselves into.

In the case of the Houthis – who are currently tagged as a terrorist organisation by the US – the movement developed in opposition to the dubious regime of Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and very much a reaction to foreign, and especially Western, intervention in the running of Yemen and in its fractious relations to other middle eastern states.

Yemen is a country of some 14 million people and fully half its population have been on the brink of starvation. In its early days the Houthi movement embraced a range of constructive ideologies and ambitions for building a better future for the people of Yemen, and members participated actively in the democratic and political structures of their country, but sustained oppression and marginalisation have driven the Houthis to radicalisation, entrenchment and a heavily militaristic outlook. Sadly, it's an ideological journey familiar to most counter-cultural and nationalist movements when they come into conflict with deeply entrenched Western attitudes to the conduct of international relations and the recognition of the differing human rights of others.

Subsequent to all the failures of diplomacy, accommodation and recognition that others have a right to see and construct their worlds differently, we have arrived at the tired old situation where a group of people who've been driven to acts of terrorism must be stopped, and the only mechanism we seem to possess to de-escalate the situation is to escalate our own dependence on militarism.

This makes conflict inevitable, and the process is becoming increasingly protracted and inconclusive – with ever greater collateral damage and civilian tragedies – as Putin has discovered in Ukraine, and the Israelis are starting to discover in Gaza.

Listening to the bullish comments this morning from some MPs in response to last night's air strikes one can't help feeling that there's a dreadful sense of inevitability about the weeks and months ahead. Having issued threats of action if Houthi attacks continued, it was inevitable that mettle would be tested, and it was equally unavoidable that a threat means nothing if you're not prepared to prosecute it. Inevitably this morning the UK has been plunged into a bitter and wearily familiar exchange of accusation and counter-accusations, threats and counter-threats, which could turn easily and quickly into a sustained and tragic conflict – and one which the UK has neither the physical resources nor the strategic maturity to engage with.

Of particular concern is the fact that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak gave the go ahead for last night's attacks without first consulting parliament. Whilst this is not a requirement it is a recognised practice and would have been sensible given that there was no imperative for a rapid response to ongoing Houthi actions. As it happens Mr Sunak was in Ukraine last night, signing off on an agreement to provide a further £2.5bn of military aid over the coming year, Britain's largest commitment since Putin's invasion; the package will include long range missiles, air defence and artillery shells and £200m worth of UK-made drone. Just £18m was committed in terms of humanitarian aid. I am here today with one message," said Mr Sunak. "The UK will also not falter. We will stand with Ukraine in their darkest hours and in better times to come. Today we are ... increasing our military aid, delivering thousands of cutting-edge drones and signing a historic new security agreement to provide Ukraine with the assurances it needs for the long term."

Long term indeed; and not a few MPs and others are starting to become increasingly nervous about our enthusiasm and commitment to what is becoming a deeply entrenched and protracted war. And if the Putin/ Ukraine conflict seems bogged down in carnage and lack of resolution, it's likely nothing to the misadventure in violence that taking on the Houthis on the ground could prove to be. The immensely powerful, wealthy and well-equipped Saudis have been trying to annihilate the Houthis since 2015 and, if anything, Houthi resolve and military abilities have only increased. Across the region of conflict the altercations have left 21.6 million people in desperate need of aid, including 11 million children and more than 4.5 million are displaced.

After last night's UK and US attacks, the Houthis have pledged significant reprisals, leaving the world to hold its breath over what might happen next, especially as most nations do not want another war breaking out with the potential of the whole region going up in flames. Prime Minister Sunak is due to give a statement to parliament on Monday seeking to reassure MPs that UK involvement was 'proportionate and legal' and that the UK is not seeking to further escalate tensions in the region. One can't help but feel that it's a wee bit too late for that. Back in 2003 similarly flawed thinking led the US and the UK to go charging in to Iraq (in response to the 9/11 attacks), in the belief that an attack would eliminate the al-Qaeda network and bring a stable state of democracy to the country. Instead a bloody civil war was unleashed that terrorised the region for years and cost hundreds of thousands of innocent lives, far more than even the most ardent of pacifists had predicted.

At the time Pope John Paul II made an impassioned plea for reason to prevail. In an address to members of the diplomatic corps at the Vatican on 13th January 2003, His Holiness said: "NO TO WAR! War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity. International law, honest dialogue, solidarity between States, the noble exercise of diplomacy: these are methods worthy of individuals and nations in resolving their differences."

Two decades on those who claim to represent the best interests of the human family have still to learn this fundamental truth, that war is the result of a basic failure of human beings to talk out their differences, and to find peaceful ways to live together. As a spokesperson for the Catholic peace organisation Pax Christi posted on X this morning: "Rishi Sunak is today pledging more arms to Ukraine. Our bombs have been dropped on Yemen. Are we sleep-walking to a world war? If the PM wants to enhance his political reputation, he'd seek peace through dialogue, not this futile aggression."

It would be comforting to think that some lessons have been learnt about conflict resolution since the disaster of 2003, but unfortunately it really doesn't look like it. In the words of the song:

*"The sorrow, the suffering, the glory, the pain
The killing and dying were all done in vain, for ... it all happened again
And again and again and again and again." **

<https://www.thecatholicnetwork.co.uk/after-us-and-uk-attacks-on-yemen-are-we-on-the-verge-of-starting-yet-another-war>

• Joseph Kelly is a Catholic writer and theologian

*See: <https://www.stopwar.org.uk/article/the-fureys-with-davey-arthur-the-green-fields-of-france/>

DRAMATIC IMPACT & SOMETHING BIGGER THAN JUSTICE

13 January 2024 **Jon Kuhrt** writes:

In 1966, the BBC play *Cathy Come Home* was a key moment in public perceptions about the reality of homelessness. This week, we have seen the ITV drama *Mr Bates v The Post Office* have a similarly seismic public impact. It's a moving and inspiring 'David v Goliath' story of a group of ordinary people's fight against overwhelming corporate injustice. And its exposure of the greed and malevolence of a trusted state institution as The Post Office makes it all the more shocking. Also, I cannot remember watching a programme which so convincingly portrays the struggles of everyday people to run businesses, serve their communities and make ends meet.

Whilst Toby Jones is brilliant in the title role, I felt Monica Dolan's portrayal of sub-postmaster Jo Hamilton was the most powerful. She runs her village post office with compassion and kindness but struggles with the centralised computer accounts system. We see her working late, increasingly desperate as the faulty system creates false deficits on her account. She then makes up shortfalls with her own money and has to re-mortgage her house twice. In the end, as deficits build, she is sacked by the Post Office and taken to court accused of stealing £36,000.

In court, many from her community attend to offer moral support and positive character references. These include her parish vicar who takes the stand and tells the Judge about the role Jo plays in the community. 'In many ways, she is more of a priest than me.' It's a generous editorial decision by the producers to include this positive portrayal of a vicar because the key character the campaigners are fighting against is also an ordained church minister. Paula Vennells, the CEO of the Post Office was a non-stipendiary minister (NSM) in the Church of England at the time.

The public controversy which has unfolded this week has led to Ms. Vennells step back from her ministry role, hand back her CBE, resign from the boards of Morrisons and Dunelm, and face calls to give back the £2.93m of bonuses she was paid during this period. In a further twist, it was leaked that she was on the short-list to become Bishop of London, the third most senior role in the Church of England. Just imagine the crisis if she had of been given this role. Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. The programme avoids any simplistic connection between Vennells' religious commitments and her handling of the scandal. But the story poses a deep, implicit challenge about the role faith should play in exposing truth, resisting greed and taking risks to seek justice.

In one of the best scenes, Alan Bates speaks to all the campaigners gathered in a village hall at the start of the litigation process:

"Win or lose it costs a fortune and there's no guarantee we'll see a penny. And I want to make it clear that there are a few other things that this group litigation is not going to do for us. I am sorry Jo, I am sorry Noel, but it's not going to overturn any criminal convictions. It's not going to discharge anyone bankruptcies, it's not going to get back anyone's house-repossessions and it's not going to repair anyone's shattered health."

He is talking to a group of people who have lost so much and do not hold much hope for the legal process they are embarking on. But Bates goes on:

"Well, I have told you all the things the law is not going to do for us. But I want you to think about what brought us together, all those things we've been fighting for ever since."

"Compensation?"

"Bigger than that"

"Justice?"

"Bigger"

"The truth?"

"Exactly. Yes, compensation. Yes, justice. But without the truth we can't do either of those. Going to law will force the Post Office to open their files. So, finally, we'll get to know everything the Post Office knows. The truth. The whole truth."

Being properly compensated financially and seeing justice done are both vitally important. But this scene and story illustrate that humans have deeper needs than what finances or legal processes can give. We have a deep desire for truth. Both on and off screen, *Mr Bates v. The Post Office* has had a dramatic impact. It's a great story, brilliantly acted. But the key to its powerful impact is because it exposes truth. And truth always sets people free.

<https://gracetruth.blog/2024/01/13/mr-bates-the-post-office-something-bigger-than-justice/>

Related post: Tell the truth <https://gracetruth.blog/2020/11/28/tell-the-truth/>

- **Jon Kuhrt** has worked with people affected by homelessness for 30 years. He is a former government adviser on how faith groups address rough sleeping and is now CEO of Hope into Action.

CHARITY AND CHURCH LEADERS CALL FOR URGENT ACTION ON RISING POVERTY IN THE UK AND AROUND THE WORLD

Senior leaders from churches and charities have called on politicians to take urgent action on rising poverty in the UK and around the world. In a joint statement released on Friday 5 January 2024, senior Christian leaders – including the General Secretary of Churches Together in England, President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference and senior leaders of development agencies Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tearfund – have said “the human cost of failing to take action now is too big and too damaging to ignore”. The statement goes on to say poverty is “a consequence of political choices and priorities”, and with a General Election on the horizon, “this year must mark the beginning of the end for poverty”.

Signatories are calling on political leaders to set out clear plans to eradicate extreme poverty and halve overall poverty by 2030, in the UK and globally. Patrick Watt, CEO of Christian Aid and another signatory, said: “For millions of people this new year has been marked by poverty and desperation. Regardless of the causes of poverty, and whether it’s hitting people internationally or in the UK, the effects are strikingly similar. Partners and churches describe its crushing effect on people’s dignity and life chances, and its damage to the social fabric. The choices we make collectively about how to tackle poverty, both domestically and internationally, matter. As we approach a General Election, we’re hearing far too little from political parties about their ambition to end poverty, and build the common good. We must not let another year slip by while poverty rises. That’s why we’re coming together at this moment, to call for urgent action to address the causes of poverty, here and around the world.”

The statement is a clear demonstration of solidarity between agencies and churches working to tackle poverty globally and in the UK.

Revd Gill Newton, President of the Methodist Conference, said: “Poverty around the world may look different in its material and social consequences. But what remains the same is the indignity, fear and isolation it causes for individuals, families and communities, wherever they are. As Christians, our commitment to tackle poverty alongside our global neighbours or within our local communities here in the UK is not in competition – we’re not prepared to pit one against the other in a game of political or economic tactics. Our political leaders must not be either. We need to see more ambition, commitment and practical action to tackle poverty wherever it exists as we approach the next General Election.”

In the statement, the churches and charities also signal their intention to work together throughout 2024 to mobilise church members to “put poverty on the agenda through practical action, prophetic words and courageous campaigning.”

As part of this, Christian Aid, the Trussell Trust, Church Action on Poverty and the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches have released Act on Poverty – a six-week resource for church groups to explore the impacts of poverty around the world and in the UK and take action ahead of the General Election. Designed for use during Lent or later in 2024, the resource brings campaigners from the UK and global contexts into dialogue about the differences and similarities between their visions for an end to poverty where they are.

Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary of Churches Together in England, said: “We want to see action on poverty now, and political leaders need to know our ambition for change. I encourage church communities to come together and share with election candidates why tackling poverty should be a priority.”

And Stef Benstead, a trustee of Church Action on Poverty who contributed to the Act on Poverty resource, said: “We know that it is politically possible to end poverty in any society. God told his people that if they followed the laws he gave them for running their country, there would be no poor people among them. That was a time without major technological advancement, yet it was still held to be possible for everyone to have a stable home and sufficient means to access food, clothing, other essentials, and social participation. According to the prophets, poverty occurred because there was injustice and a failure by the leaders of the country to enact policies that guaranteed a minimum living standard for everyone. Christians across the UK and the world should have the confidence to call on our leaders, in the name of God, to act now to end poverty.”

Charities and groups focusing on rising poverty in the UK are supporting the new Let’s End Poverty movement, aimed at bringing together a diverse movement of people calling on political leaders to end poverty in the UK for good. <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/charity-and-church-leaders-call-for-urgent-action-on-rising-poverty-in-the-uk-and-around-the-world/>

OUR CALLING IN DARK TIMES

Jenny Sinclair 11 January 2024 (Updated 12 Jan 2024)

Jenny Sinclair is Founder and Director of Together for the Common Good. This is an edited version of her talk, 'The Relational Church: Our Calling in Dark Times' given at Hinsley Hall, Leeds, on 1 December 2023. Jenny was guest speaker for the Northern Diaconate Formation Partnership's training weekend.

The Catholic tradition is quite explicit that the Church's relationship with the poor is central. The poor and excluded are supposed to be at the heart of the Church. This is very challenging for Churches that have become middle class. 'Walking together' - this phrase that we're using now - with poor people, does not mean just serving their needs. Many Churches fall into the trap of welfarism - that is, a defeatist politics that sees increasing social security benefits as the primary way to help poor people.

How different is this from the way of communion, where we enter into a relationship of solidarity which then naturally and organically advocates for jobs and investment to enable everyone to reach their aspirations. A relationship with people who are low paid means mutual respect and respecting their agency. There's a reciprocity though, that means hearing each other's stories, spending time together. Not a service-client relationship.

Catholic Social Teaching helps us stay true to mission.

About eight years ago you might remember Pope Francis said, "We are living not through an era of change, but a change of era." We've got to take that seriously. He wasn't the only one to spot this. To understand why becoming relational is important, we need to understand this new era.

In many cases people need to be reconverted or even introduced to our own tradition of Catholic social teaching. It's often said to be the best kept secret but it's really unforgivable now. It's a worldview. It's a fantastic framework for good judgement.

So Catholic Social Teaching - which has been called the theology of the Holy Spirit in practice - can help us recognise what's going on. It helps us understand these matters of political economy - that means, how our society is structured in terms of how power is arranged, our arrangements in terms of jobs, investments and so on. It helps us to understand and identify the social and cultural systems that are dehumanising. It's always concerned about the human person. It gives us an authentically Christian and Catholic political literacy, It helps us avoid mission drift, which is a massive risk just now and resist the corrosive influences of all kinds of secular ideologies which are becoming so active in this era.

These ideologies are dangerous for Christians. Secular humanism laughs at God. It reduces religion to a lifestyle choice, it aims to relegate the Church to a private club out of the public square. And this post-modernist ideology wants us to adopt false ideas about human beings. And some well-intentioned people - sadly in the Church - have been seduced into these worldviews. But we should be confident in our Christian identity. We need to remember we are made in the image of God: and as Christians our identity is in Jesus Christ.

So back in 1891, when Catholic Social Teaching - the modern version of it - started, it was mounting a response to the Industrial Revolution, noticing what was happening to human beings. It emerged from a Church that was standing in solidarity with the poor at that time. An authentic, reciprocal relationship with poor people helps us to discern the signs of the times. We're not in relationship with poor people, so we tend not to be able to read the signs of the times properly.

It has then continued to guide us all these years with encyclicals, letters and guidance - to uphold true freedom, to uphold the human spirit - to resist what we might call 'the principalities and powers'.

So Catholic Social Teaching, identifies, in simple terms, three types of power, the two earthly powers of money and state and the one transcendent power of human beings in relationship with each other and with God. Because we're made in the image of God, we are partly transcendent, and that means relational power is a transcendent power.

Correctly understood, Catholic Social Teaching transcends left and right. It's non-partisan, it's not anti-capitalist, because it recognises that capital can be creative, but it recognises that it has exploitative, extractive and commodifying tendencies and so it has to be constrained.

But neither is Catholic Social Teaching pro- or anti-state. It recognises that governments can and do promote the good, and it also calls out bureaucratic systems in the administrative state when they become dehumanising, too technocratic, too centralised. It's always concerned about the human person.

So, it calls for both state and money power to be de-centralised, distributed wherever possible to local institutions and to the family which it regards as the building block of society.

The Catholic Social Teaching lens can help us navigate this change of era.

See Jenny Sinclair's talk in full: <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/from-jenny-sinclair/the-relational-church>
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48899>

WEALTH OF EU'S RICHEST SOARS WHILE 99% OF POPULATION IS POORER

15 January 2024: The EU's five richest billionaires increased their wealth by 76 percent since 2020, from 244 billion euro to 429 billion, at a rate of 5.7 million euros per hour. At the same time, 99 percent of the EU's population has become poorer. These findings are based on Oxfam's new report on inequality and global corporate power. The report also reveals that if current trends continue, the world will have its first trillionaire within a decade, but poverty will not be eradicated for another 229 years.

'Inequality Inc.'" published today as business elites gather in the Swiss resort town of Davos, shows that seven out of ten of the world's biggest corporations have a billionaire as CEO or principal shareholder. These corporations are worth 9.3 trillion euros, equivalent to more than the combined GDPs of all countries in Africa and Latin America.

"We're witnessing the beginnings of a decade of division, with billions of people shouldering the economic shockwaves of pandemic, inflation and war, while billionaires' fortunes boom. This inequality is no accident; the billionaire class is ensuring corporations deliver more wealth to them at the expense of everyone else," said Oxfam International interim Executive Director Amitabh Behar.

Despite representing less than six percent of the global population, the EU hosts 15 percent of the world's billionaires and 16 percent of global billionaire wealth. Since 2020, billionaires in the EU increased their accumulated wealth by one-third, reaching 1.9 trillion euros last year.

A progressive wealth tax on EU multi-millionaires and billionaires between two and five percent could raise 286.5 billion euros each year. This could pay 40 percent of the EU's recovery fund.

"Literally, every hour that governments fail to act is worth millions, and the EU is no exception. A European wealth tax is vital to stop us from falling into a new age of billionaire supremacy. By fairly taxing Europe's richest, the EU holds the key to start narrowing the chasm between them and the rest of us," said Chiara Putaturo, Oxfam's EU tax expert.

Mirroring the fortunes of the super-rich, 22 of some of the biggest companies in the EU made 172 billion euros in net profit from July 2022 to June 2023. This is 66 percent more than their average profit for 2018 - 2021.

"Runaway corporate and monopoly power is an inequality-generating machine: through squeezing workers, dodging tax, privatizing the state, and spurring climate breakdown, corporations are funnelling endless wealth to their ultra-rich owners. But they're also funnelling power, undermining our democracies and our rights. No corporation or individual should have this much power over our economies and our lives -to be clear, nobody should have a billion dollars", said Behar.

An example of a modern monopoly man in the EU is the world's second richest man, the French billionaire Bernard Arnault. He presides over the luxury goods empire LVMH, an umbrella of brands like Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton and Chandon. The group has been fined by France's anti-trust body. He also owns France's biggest media outlet, Les Échos, as well as Le Parisien.

Oxfam's report also shows a 'war on taxation' by corporations. In the EU, the corporate tax rate fell from 32.2 percent in 2000 to 21.5 percent in 2023. Globally, only four percent of the 1,600 largest companies publicly disclose their global tax strategy and corporate income taxes paid in all countries.

People worldwide are working harder and longer hours, often for poverty wages in precarious and unsafe jobs. The wages of nearly 800 million workers have failed to keep up with inflation and they have lost 1.4 trillion euros over the last two years, equivalent to nearly a month (25 days) of lost wages for each worker.

"Every corporation has a responsibility to act but very few are. Governments must step up. There is action that lawmakers can learn from, from US anti-monopoly government enforcers suing Amazon in a landmark case, to the European Commission wanting Google to break up its online advertising business, and Africa's historic fight to reshape international tax rules", said Behar.

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), published in 2013, urges the faithful to respond to the Gospel, to live it more fully and more deeply, reaching out to the poor and broken, ending injustice, and building peace. And finding joy in all of it.

The document spells out:

37. Works of love directed to one's neighbour are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit....

48. We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them.

53. Just as the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say 'thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality.

54. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime, all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.

57. I encourage financial experts and political leaders to ponder the words of [Saint John Chrysostom], one of the sages of antiquity: "Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs.

177. ...at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others. The content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral implication centered on charity.

187. Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid.

188. In this context, we can understand Jesus' command to his disciples: "You yourselves give them something to eat!" (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.

189. The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them.

191. In all places and circumstances, Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor.... Seeing their poverty, hearing their cries and knowing their sufferings, we are scandalized because we know that there is enough food for everyone and that hunger is the result of a poor distribution of goods and income.

198. This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them....

201. ...none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice....

203. The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48923>

Download Oxfam's report 'Inequality Inc': <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/inequality-inc-how-corporate-power-divides-our-world-and-the-need-for-a-new-era-621583/>

Read the full exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*:

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

WCC URGES WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM TO CONSIDER LONGER-TERM GOOD OF ALL PEOPLE

15 January 2024: As the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting commenced in Davos beginning 15 January, World Council of Churches general secretary Rev Prof Dr Jerry Pillay urged the gathering to renew its commitment to multilateral cooperation for the longer-term good of all people. The forum is convening under the theme 'Rebuilding Trust.'

Pillay reflected that trust is the essential ingredient without which human societies-and the global community-cannot function. "However, in today's divided and increasingly conflictual world, it is a commodity in critically short supply," said Pillay. "While some of those in attendance in Davos are themselves drivers of inequality, injustice, and division, we want to believe that many others are genuinely committed to exercising their considerable influence to promote a greater measure of justice and peace in the world."

The four key themes identified for the meeting are: "Achieving Security and Cooperation in a Fractured World," "Creating Growth and Jobs for a New Era," "Artificial Intelligence as a Driving Force for the Economy and Society," and "A Long-Term Strategy for Climate, Nature, and Energy."

Rebuilding trust will be an essential precondition for progress in any of these areas, Pillay observed.

"Given the unprecedented constellation of global crises - especially of climate, conflict, and economic inequality - there is an urgent need for cooperation and action, rather than division and unconstructive competition," he said. "The Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum gathers key decision-makers in the fields of politics, economics and business. The power of this gathering must be leveraged for rebuilding trust and the renewal of commitment to multilateral cooperation in facing these crises, not only in the short-term interests of a privileged few but for the longer-term good of all people and our common home."

A WELCOME FOR ALL

Anne O'Connor writes: In the build-up to Christmas there was a massive sign in the glass porch of our local Baptist Church with just one word: **REFUGEE**, in white lettering with the final **E** crossed out with a bold red **X**.

At a time when refugees and asylum seekers seem to be regarded as less than human by those in power it was incredibly moving to see this unequivocal declaration of welcome.

The sign is still there for all to see and next to it the following statement, also in bold lettering:

'We welcome people of all ages, genders, ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, physical and mental abilities, neuro-diversities, education, classes, economic status or political outlook. We welcome all people who are seeking to follow Jesus to participate in all areas of church life including baptism, communion, church membership, child dedication, leadership of mission, ministry and eldership. We also warmly receive same sex couples into our community to participate in all areas of church life. We believe in Church which is Scripturally faithful, seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.'

LENT ACTION AND RESOURCES

JOIN THE NO FAITH IN FOSSIL FUELS LENT VIGIL

Christian Climate Action: The No Faith in Fossil Fuels Lent Vigil is a ten-day event set to take place in Westminster – home of the UK Parliament. Christians from across the country will gather together from Ash Wednesday, holding vigil across ten days, day and night. The vigil will be launched with an Ash Wednesday Church Service at St John's Church, Waterloo and will close with a service outside Downing Street.

When? Vigil starts Feb 14th at 2:30pm, runs for 10 days, ending on the 24th Feb at 3pm.

Where? Carriage Gate, outside Parliament, Westminster, London.

Why? Around the world creation is crying out. Heatwaves, fires, droughts and floods are becoming more frequent, wrecking lives, land, and livelihoods. Meanwhile, the biggest polluters who have caused this crisis make vast profits from fossil fuels. As creation groans, the poorest, who have done the least to cause the problem, are paying the price.

As the climate crisis wreaks havoc in our world, we are drawn to our most ancient of traditions – prayer. We have faith that our prayers are heard and can bring transformation, even in the midst of injustice. Lent offers us space to lament our failure to address the climate emergency, and as we approach the Easter season of renewal, we hope and strive for climate justice. We endeavour for our prayers to be participatory – moving us into action and calling on our politicians to make the changes needed.

<https://christianclimateaction.org/2023/12/08/join-us-for-the-no-faith-in-fossil-fuels-lent-vigil-for-climate-justice-14-24-february-2024/>

WALK 200KM IN 40 DAYS TO HELP FIGHT GLOBAL POVERTY

CAFOD and **SCIAF** are teaming up to bring the **Big Lent Walk** to Great Britain! Read more about us and our decision to join forces. Thousands of walkers from England, Wales, Scotland and beyond, will be tying up their purple laces and walking an incredible 200km this Lent to fight global poverty. So, sign up to do the Big Lent Walk yourself, or join in with your school or parish. Then put your best foot forward with the biggest group of Big Lent Walkers yet. Challenge yourself and take on The Big Lent Walk! Walk when and where you choose over 40 days, alone or with friends. Raise money to help people as they overcome poverty.

CAFOD and SCIAF are the official relief and development agencies of the Catholic Church for England and Wales (CAFOD) and for Scotland (SCIAF), and we are both members of the global Caritas Internationalis family. We both believe that a green and just world, free from poverty, is possible. We are teaming up this year because we know that working together means that we can make an even bigger difference.

Our goal: to get thousands of teams or individual walkers all going, getting fundraising in and raising awareness of inequality across the world. Together means big change can happen. The money you raise by taking part in the Big Lent Walk will enable us to continue fighting global poverty and working through expert local partners to bring real life change to communities overseas.

WHY ARE WE WALKING THIS LENT?

Your sponsorship can and will change lives. Every £1 raised through the Big Lent Walk will help fight poverty globally in countries like Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.

This year these are our focus areas for Lent:

CAFOD's Lent Appeal is helping fishing communities feed their families in Liberia

SCIAF's WEE BOX Appeal is focused on women and girls in Rwanda facing gender-based violence.

Furthermore, CAFOD and SCIAF have a shared project in Ethiopia and we are working together to respond to the devastating food crisis there. Years of drought caused by the climate crisis means families are no longer able to cope, but your support means we are working with people right now, providing them with water, emergency food and healthcare.

With your hard work and sponsorship this Lent, we can change families' lives for good and tell poverty to take a hike. <https://walk.cafod.org.uk/about>

See also prayer resources: <https://cafod.org.uk/pray/prayer-resources/lent-prayer-2024>

<https://cafod.org.uk/pray/lent-prayers>

<https://cafod.org.uk/pray/prayer-resources/stations-of-the-cross>

ACT ON POVERTY: LENT PROGRAMME

One in five people live in relative poverty. The gap between rich and poor is rising and political disengagement continues to be a problem. With the upcoming general elections, it's time to speak up to create a just and compassionate society, one where nobody is dragged down by poverty.

Join us as this Lent for the **Act on Poverty programme**, designed to help churches across the UK host meaningful conversations about how to act on poverty and how to shape the political agenda.

A New Lent course for 2024 produced by Christian Aid working with the Baptist Union, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Church Action on Poverty, The Trussell Trust, and others. The series of six resource packs for small groups will help guide your church through Lent 2024.

The Act on Poverty Course explores six themes:

1. Prophetic

This pack looks at what it means for churches to speak prophetically. The Bible shows us that being a prophet is far from easy. Many prophets have felt powerless, despite being called by God to speak out. How, with God's help, can your church develop its prophetic voice when speaking about poverty?

2. Broken

We are increasingly aware of the divisiveness of politics in the UK today. But this is not the only place where there is division. Our churches, our world, our selves are all in need of redemption and repair. This pack helps you discuss division and brokenness in our different contexts. The resource opens up space to think together about where repentance is needed, and how we can be part of God's healing and redeeming work.

3. Generous

Many people in the UK are having to tighten their belts due to the cost-of-living crisis. In this pack we take a close look at the lived experience of poverty, both near to home and around the world. We explore poverty as a justice issue that demands action. Churches can explore what it might mean to be 'generous' or 'cheerful givers' (2 Corinthians 9.7) when we feel like we have nothing to spare. What gifts do we have that we can share?

4. Located

Beginning with reflections on where Jesus chose to place himself during his ministry, this pack equips your church to look afresh at where you are located. This includes your physical environment, community resources, local concerns and priorities. Groups can explore questions about how we discern what God is already doing in our community, about life on the margins, and who has power in your locality.

5. Hopeful

This pack helps churches outline their hopes for the future and turn these hopes into a manifesto for action. There are practical ideas about facilitating events and community discussion in the lead up to the General Election. And there's an exploration of how nurturing hope can be part of our calling to love our neighbour. What will your church do to grow hope in 2024?

6. Together

Our final pack looks at what we can do together to tackle poverty, local and global. This resource focuses on practical action in community, suggesting a range of ways to come together, perhaps hosting a shared meal or event to which you can invite your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates and MP's. Sharing time, ideas and food as we plan to Act on Poverty together. This can act as a standalone session or mark the culmination of your course over the last five weeks.

Sign up here: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/act-poverty-resource-packs>

Or here: <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/actonpoverty/>

THINKING FAITH LENT ZOOM RETREAT: 8-10 March 2024. Evening sessions only. **Theme: *Fasting and Feasting*.**

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

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Anne O'Connor writes: At the start of October 2023 the following email request was passed on to me from NJPN: "My name is Michael Stewart and I'm the education co-ordinator at Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand (the Catholic agency for Justice, Peace and Development in NZ). We are 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."

A fruitful email correspondence followed resulting in a slide show presentation of my Stations of the Cross as part of Caritas Aotearoa's Lent in Schools programme for 2024: <https://www.caritas.org.nz/lent-schools>
Here's the finished resource: <https://link.caritas.org.nz/Lent2024-Stations-of-the-Cross-Seniors>

The slide show is introduced as follows:

'The Stations of the Cross offer a poignant journey of reflection, allowing us to meditate upon the actions of Jesus on His path to the cross on Good Friday. This year, we are embarking on a virtual spiritual journey through Aotearoa, starting from the top of the North Island and ending at the bottom of the South Island. During this journey, we will visit different parishes and schools to commemorate the Stations of the Cross.

Our hope is that this collaborative project will not only unite our Catholic community but also foster a deep appreciation for the spiritual richness that each parish and school uniquely contributes. We look forward to your journey with us this Lenten season and extend a special thanks to all those schools who have contributed to this project.

Inspired by our Lenten theme ***The Time is Now!*** this presentation will bring to life the final stages of Jesus' earthly journey as we look with hope to the future and the resurrection of our saviour. It provides a simple yet meaningful portrayal of the Stations of the Cross, designed to engage and inspire. Our hope is that this reflective experience will enable students to connect more deeply to the significance of Holy Week and embrace the message of God's great love and sacrifice for each of us.

And we also thank Anne O'Connor from the NJPN (National Justice and Peace Network) all the way from England for her amazing writing for the *Walking with Jesus, Reflection and Prayer* sections for stations 1-14.'

OTHER RESOURCES

***Stations of the Cross for Young People (adapted by Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand):** <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/app/uploads/2019/02/Stations-of-the-Cross-for-Young-People-2019.pdf>

Justice and Peace Stations of the Cross:

<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/app/uploads/2020/03/justice-and-peace-stations-of-the-cross-2020.pdf>

Ecological Way of the Cross first composed by Columban Fr Sean McDonagh in 2012 (adapted)

<https://jpshrewsbury.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/ecological-way-of-the-cross-2022.pdf>

EASTER POEM

Behold the man,
Who in frailty walks,
Towards his cross shaped throne.
Arms outstretched,
Love enfleshed,
To welcome sinners home.

Behold the man,
Whose healing hands,
Were once nailed to cursed tree,
Hope restoring,
Grace declaring,
To set the shackled free.

Behold the man,
Whose beaten body,
Was laid in garden grave,
Death defeated
Hell retreating,
Humanity to save.

Behold the man,
Whose silent corpse,
Was raised to reign as King.
Love embracing,
Joy empowering,
For him the saints will sing.



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Rev Jon Swales is Lighthouse
Mission Priest for Leeds

THE PRINCE – A STORY FOR EASTER

Pedro was the oldest of all the animals in the barn. His coat was shabby and bits of fur hung in clumps around his neck where the farmer's children had clung to him as they rode on his back. One of his ears was badly crumpled; the other jagged and torn from a run-in with a much younger donkey - poor Pedro always seemed to come off worst in a brawl. Maybe it was because he had such a gentle nature and shied away from conflict: not like some of the others in the yard who were always spoiling for a fight.

If truth were told, Pedro had turned into a bit of a joke. The farmer had thought more than once about letting him go but the children kept begging him not to and anyway, who would want such a mangy, weather-beaten old scrap of a thing? He was good for nothing except pulling the hay-cart to market once a week and he was getting slower and slower doing even that.

All the other animals made fun of Pedro. 'Look at that useless old-timer!' mocked the cocky young stallion. 'He should be put out to grass!' 'Yes, he gives the rest of us a bad name,' agreed the pretty new mare. Her coat was a silky, shimmering black, dark as ebony and smooth as glass. It glistened whenever the sun caught it and the stable lads loved to brush and polish it. Heads turned wherever she went. She would acknowledge these admiring glances with a haughty toss of her mane and a swish of her luxurious tail.

One day there was great excitement in the barn and a flurry of activity. None of the animals knew what was going on until the old cart-horse overheard two of the stable lads talking together. He reported back to the other animals who huddled round and listened with great interest. 'Seem a very important Prince is expected in the city any day now,' he confided. 'Not sure who he is, didn't catch the name, but someone of the utmost majesty and style. They reckon he'll come here.'

At this the young stallion and the pretty mare became quite agitated. 'The young Prince will want to ride into the city on my back,' boasted the young stallion, his chest puffing up with pride. 'There is no finer animal than myself to carry him.'

'Well I don't think so,' retorted the pretty mare. 'You are strong, to be sure, but my mane is braided and tasselled with fine beads and sparkling jewels. A grand Prince will need to display his riches and authority, and what better way than to enter the city on my back.'

The wise old cart-horse said nothing. He was used to their silly boasting and preferred to keep his opinions to himself. But that night he wondered which of them might be chosen, if their stable was to provide a mount for the Prince.

The day of the Prince's arrival came. The route into the city was decked with garlands. People started gathering at the roadside from first light, all hoping to catch a glimpse of the Prince as he rode by. Some brought home-made banners to welcome him; others had flags to wave; others rose-petals to scatter on the path as he approached. There was a buzz of excitement and anticipation throughout the city. What would the new Prince look like? Would his robes be covered in splendid jewels? Would he wave to the crowd or would he be too high and mighty to take notice of them?

Pedro stayed behind in the barn. He felt too insignificant to join in the preparations.

Suddenly there was a great commotion: people running here and there in a mad panic. The farmer's booming voice could be heard approaching the stable. 'Well, your Majesty, I have many fine animals who might carry Your Highness into the city. Please, I beg you, take your pick. Here is my young stallion, the pride of the whole region.' At this the stallion bowed a deep and reverential bow. The Prince smiled. 'Or what about this pretty mare? See how her coat glistens and reflects the light. Her jewels will convey your greatness to all who see you, for I notice you wear no finery yourself, Sir.' The farmer seemed rather puzzled as he spoke, for indeed, the young Prince looked like no other he had ever seen. He was simply dressed and looked for all the world as though he were just an ordinary peasant. The farmer could not understand why he had not made more of an effort to display his wealth and power.

The Prince glanced politely at the pretty mare but he seemed distracted. 'Are there no other animals here?' he asked the farmer. 'Well none except my old donkey, Pedro, and really he's good for nothing. I only keep him because the children are fond of him.' The farmer was becoming more embarrassed by the minute.

The Prince went over to the corner of the barn where Pedro stood quietly munching some hay. 'Hello, old fellow,' he whispered. 'My, what soft fur you have.' He patted Pedro gently. 'How about taking me into the city today?'

Pedro could hardly believe his ears. The Prince wanted him, the oldest and shabbiest of all the animals in the stable, to take him into the city for the grand parade!

The other animals snorted with disgust. But Pedro was speaking. 'Yes, my Lord, nothing would give me greater pleasure. It would be an honour to carry you on my back.'

And that is how a lowly donkey, was chosen to carry the greatest Prince of all into the city of Jerusalem and why his story will never be forgotten.

© Anne O'Connor

DIARY

JANUARY

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

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

19 An evening of stories, songs and solidarity at Tiviot Dale Methodist Church, SK1 1TA, in Stockport. All proceeds to Hope School in Beit Jala, Palestine, starting at 7.30pm. Organised by Dave Hardman who is now the Methodist international representative in Jerusalem, and featuring singer/songwriters Paul Field and Martin John Nicholls plus a Zaytoun stall. Tickets £10 <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/paul-field-martin-john-nicholls-in-concert-tickets-772832241037>

22 Webinar: Winning a Fossil Free Future 7pm - 8.30pm launch of Global Justice Now's new UK-wide campaign for a Fossil Fuel Treaty. Free event. Sign up here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/winning-a-fossil-free-future-tickets-777020829217>

26-28 Christians Aware Annual Conference - Hinsley Hall, Leeds **Theme: Strangers and Pilgrims: People, Displacement and Migration in God's World** http://www.christiansaware.co.uk/2024_conf.html

30 Zoom Talk on the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel by Ann Wilson. Ann was an Ecumenical Accompanier, part of an international programme of observers. She monitored the interaction between Palestinian inhabitants and the Israeli military. Ann will speak of her experiences in a ZOOM TALK organised by the St Alban's Justice and Peace Group, Macclesfield at 7.30pm (doors open at 7pm.) You will be most welcome to join us <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83009341158?pwd=Q1dNbGZSSWJuNElqTkNlcnBaRGd0Z09>

FEBRUARY

1 Evangelisation and Ideology - The Common Good Response to Identity Politics an Online Lecture and Q & A with Professor Matthew Petrusek organised by Together for the Common Good. Free event starting at 6.30pm. Book at: <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/togetherforthecommongood/1116871>

11 Church Action on Poverty Sunday <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday/>

14-24 NO FAITH IN FOSSIL FUELS LENT VIGIL <https://christianclimateaction.org/2023/12/08/join-us-for-the-no-faith-in-fossil-fuels-lent-vigil-for-climate-justice-14-24-february-2024/>

17 Closing entry date for Columban Schools Media Competition: 'Biodiversity Matters' See more info here: www.columbancompetition.com/

24 NJPN Open Networking Day – online meeting NJPN Open Meeting via Zoom 'Live or Let Die' - A call to care for the poor and for the earth. For more details and to register contact admin@justice-andpeace.org.uk

MARCH

7 Hope into Action's Annual Conference <https://www.hopeintoaction.org.uk/conference-2024>

8-10 Thinking Faith Lent Retreat on Zoom: Evening sessions only. **Theme: *Fasting and Feasting*.** For more information, contact Sr Margaret on margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk, or visit our website: www.boarbankhall.org.uk

MAY

11 NJPN Annual General Meeting at Romero House, London. For more information contact admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk

24 Catholic Association for Racial Justice - 40th Anniversary Year. The Event will be held at Amigo Hall – St Georges Cathedral, Southwark. It will include Speakers on Travellers, Caste discrimination, Migrants and Citizens of colour, Black Vocations (priesthood, female religious and the diaconate), 'Love the Stranger' (CBCEW) and a discussion of the Racial Justice Agenda for Change. The Event will end with Mass in Southwark Cathedral. <https://www.carj.org.uk/> More details to follow.

ADVANCE NOTICE

27 JULY – 3 AUGUST Thinking Faith Summer Residential. 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. For more information, contact Sr Margaret on margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk, or visit our website: www.boarbankhall.org.uk

NJPN are STILL looking for a new Treasurer. Do you know of anyone with financial experience that would be willing to take on the role of Treasurer? Please share with your parishes/organisations, and if anyone is interested, please email Sharon at admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk

DON'T MISS THE LATEST NJPN E BULLETIN WITH A WEALTH OF ARTICLES AND INFO: Download here:
<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/01/NJPN-E-Bulletin-7th-January-2024.pdf>

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

● **Read the WINTER issue of MOUTHPEACE** the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/app/uploads/2023/11/Winter-Mouthpeace-2023-4.pdf>

● 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