

## NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin February 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](mailto:anneoc980@hotmail.com)*

### CHILDREN OF GAZA: A LOST GENERATION

**Gillian Hugo** 1 February 2024 **Source: The Jesuit Institute South Africa**

"Gaza, is the most dangerous place in the world for children," said Tess Ingram of UNICEF in an interview with eNCA on 22 December 2023. According to UNICEF statistics, 40% of the deaths recorded in Gaza are children. As of 11 January, more than 10,000 children were confirmed dead. Many more are missing under the rubble.

"About 160 children are killed every day; that's one every 10 minutes," said UN World Health Organization (WHO) spokesperson Christian Lindmeier.

"If youngsters continue to have restricted access to water and sanitation in Gaza, we will see a tragic yet entirely avoidable surge in the number of children dying," UNICEF spokesperson James Elder told journalists. "In all wars, it is children who suffer first and suffer most."

UNICEF is calling for "an immediate and long-lasting ceasefire" to get aid into Gaza. Aid in the simple form of food, water, soap, and first-aid supplies to more complex items like generators, medical equipment and construction equipment.

This, along with the complications and implications of disease due to no or poor sanitation, and access to food, water and adequate health care, make the situation dire. There are over 100,000 cases of diarrhoea (with over half of these among children under age five), 160,000 cases of acute respiratory infections and other diseases like chickenpox, lice, scabies, skin rashes and jaundice. "There is a desperate need for health attention for the children of Gaza at the moment", according to Tess Ingram. There is also a real risk of famine as no nutritious food is available in Gaza. Tess Ingram continued, saying, "There are 180 babies being born into this war every day." I can only imagine the struggle of those and other mothers to nourish themselves and their newborns.

The war and conflict are significantly traumatising and affecting the mental health of these children, too. They are experiencing fear and trauma repeatedly, day after day. There is displacement, injury, death, and all the other challenges we have already mentioned.

Inclement weather for those whose homes have been destroyed and are now living on the streets is not helping. They are cold and hungry. The lightning strikes and thunder sounds are terrifying, raising fear of airstrikes. The long-term impact of this war on mental health will only be established if and when this war ends.

The children in Gaza are also facing the loss of education and learning. Students, teachers, (at least 183) and other school staff have been killed. At least 300 schools have been damaged. No child or student in Gaza has had any access to education since the start of this conflict on 7 October 2023. So, there is a tremendous impact on schooling and education as well. UNICEF is trying to assess the current situation and how best to rebuild schools and provide educational facilities. They are providing mental health support and recreational activities for these children to help them find a bit of fun and distract them from the atrocities that they are facing, even if only temporarily.

Children in Israel have lost their lives, too. But, when you compare the reported 33 children killed in the October 7 attack on Israel with the thousands of children that have been killed in Gaza since then, it seems fair that our focus remains on the children of Palestine. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on November 6 said that "Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children."

The fact that the children of Gaza are being cut off from essential services, held hostage and being harmed and killed is an atrocity. UNICEF says, "The cost to children and their communities of this violence will be borne out for generations to come."

At the end of their bi-annual plenary this past week, the Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa called for a total cessation of hostilities and a just settlement in the Holy Land. We, too, call for an immediate and long-term ceasefire, an end to this horrendous war.

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## IAN LINDEN: REFUGEE CHILDREN - THE KINDERTRANSPORT AND TODAY

7 February 2024

Lord (Alf) Dubs fought back tears as he spoke in the House of Lords on 2 February during the Holocaust Remembrance debate. He had been referring to *One Life*, the film recently in cinemas, and starring Anthony Hopkins, about the 1939 evacuation of children from the Nazi threat in Czechoslovakia. Aged six, Alf Dubs had been on one of those Kindertransport trains from Prague.

Lord Dubs had other reasons for emotion. In 2016 he had struggled to get a commitment to allow 3,000 child refugees from Europe to enter the UK. Section 67 of the 2016 Immigration Bill, known as the Dubs amendment, makes the commitment "to relocate to the United Kingdom and support a specified number of unaccompanied refugee children from other countries in Europe". Only 350 children were allowed to enter before, in February 2017, the British government without adequate reason, unlawfully abandoned this aspect of the Bill. At the time, Local Authorities denied that there were no longer places for children available and some further 150 children were later allowed entry.

Today, it is the right to family reunification, contained in the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) and guaranteed by the European Court of Human Rights ECHR, that requires pressure if it is to be honoured. Lord Dubs worked with some success to get government agreement that these family reunification provisions would be respected post-Brexit.

In 2023 opposition to the - well-named - Illegal Immigration Bill was led by the Churches who championed the rights of refugee children, in opposition to a government hostile to migrants and asylum seekers. The then Minister of State for Immigration, Robert Jenrick, demonstrated this hostility - for the benefit of the Tory right-wing - by ordering the painting out of cartoon figures, intended to welcome children, on the walls of Manston refugee reception centre in Kent.

Against this background of growing government legal pressure on migrants and refugees it was serendipity, rather than foresight, that brought *One Life* to cinema screens just as the government's 'stop the boats' campaign reached obsession level generating, as Lord (Ken) Clarke (a former Conservative Home Secretary) observed, deranged forms of legislation. Directed by James Hawes, known for his television films, *One Life* is a co-production with BBC Films. It is a well-told unpretentious, morality story. If you were watching at home, you would feel good as you switched off the TV. So, no blockbuster this. Nor suitable for young children who would be distressed by the heartbreaking suffering of the, mainly Jewish, children being parted from their families in Prague, though the film mainly suggests, rather than shows, Nazi brutality, through the visible fear of its victims. By focusing on a few families and their children – the children's photographs and their names play a prominent role throughout - refugees become individuals like our own children, but vulnerable, confused and in peril; they are not just numbers.

Anthony Hopkins plays Nicholas Winton, a stockbroker who initiated and organised the evacuation of children from Prague. During the opening sequences viewers easily identify with Winton in his old age as his wife nags him to clear out all the old documents cluttering up his study. Papers which, of course, contain the film's story. Hopkins remembering to camera, even if a little too lengthy, and starring in *That's Life* reunited with those he had saved, gives a masterful performance portraying Winton's humility. The cut-backs to the young Nicholas Winton – Johnny Flynn looking remarkably like the old footage of the character he portrays – come naturally.

The screenplay based on daughter, Barbara Winton's *If It's Not Impossible...: The Life of Sir Nicholas Winton*, published in 2014, sticks closely to what is known. Through his children's section' of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (BCRC) Winton managed to transport eight train-loads, 669 children, from Prague to London and to settle them in foster families. There are contemporary resonances, initial opposition from the UK government followed by the overwhelming documentation required for each child to obtain a visa plus an indemnity charge of £50 (£2,800 today) to cover possible future costs of repatriation.

*The Kindertransport: What Really Happened*, Andrea Hammel, Polity Books, 2023, paints the wider picture of the fate of child refugees from Nazi rule. Here is a more critical account of what happened to the 10,000 children fleeing to Britain from Germany and Poland, between 1933-1939. (Many initially fled to the closer but soon unsafe Belgium, France and Netherlands). Hammel highlights how the long-term consequences of traumatic separation from parents remained unacknowledged and how the religious, Jewish, upbringing of the children in Christian or secular foster families was neglected. In *One Life*, a conversation between a Rabbi and Winton does touch on this religious and cultural problem, though at the time it was Orthodox Jews in the UK who objected most to the point of taking a group of children into their care. At the outbreak of war some children who had reached sixteen were even interned. What was treated as temporary separation, of course, proved permanent as parents died in the Holocaust.

Alf Dubs was in some ways exceptionally fortunate. His father met him at Liverpool Street Station and his mother later managed to join them. But, when all is said and done, the alternative to the Kindertransport is shown in the fate of the 250 children on the ninth and last train, raided by the Nazis before it left Prague, one of the few violent and deeply upsetting scenes in *One Life*.

Where is the moral in the Kindertransport story, a footnote to the Holocaust? What virtues did Nicholas Winton deploy to save those lives? Unusually for a banker and a stockbroker, he was on the left of the Labour Party. He decided, rather than taking a skiing holiday, to go and join a friend in the Prague BCRC. In Prague he was moved by compassion. Baptised a Christian, Winton was the middle child of a German Jewish immigrant family. He saw first-hand the plight of the Jewish and other families and did something about it revealing exceptional – often underrated – organisational abilities. Winton, his mother (played by Helena Bonham Carter) and the BCRC demonstrated not just empathy but extraordinary perseverance, hope and tenacity. “If something is not impossible, there must be a way to do it” was Winton’s motto.

*One Life* and the story of the Czech Kindertransport have a déjà vu feeling. As I left Liverpool Street Station last week, I looked with new eyes at the familiar statue of the Kindertransport children in the half light of an early winter evening. The British government in the late 1930s, for some of the same reasons as today’s, sought to limit the number of refugees entering the UK, though it did have the excuse of being threatened by a coming World War. Then it was civil society, refugee organisations plus a strong Quaker element, who asserted and put into practice the duty to admit refugees. Today it is still the Churches with refugee NGOs who practice compassion and solidarity challenging government hostility. Then Nicholas Winton embodied these national values. Today it is Alf Dubs.

<https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/refugee-children-kindertransport-today>

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

## REFLECTION: PEACE IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITIES

7 February 2024

Canon Rob Esdaile gave the following reflection addressing violence and abuse in our homes, families and wider communities at the Arundel and Brighton J&P Assembly recently:

There are two questions I want to ask today: what has our Christian faith got to say about peace in our relationships and communities? And, secondly: are we part of the solution (as the Church normally assumes) or part of the problem? I am going to start by reading a well-known poem by Brian Wren:

Say "No" to peace  
if what they mean by peace  
is the quiet misery of hunger,  
the frozen stillness of fear,  
the silence of broken spirits,  
the unborn hopes of the oppressed.

Tell them that peace  
is the shouting of children at play,  
the babble of tongues set free,  
the thunder of dancing feet,  
and a father's voice singing.

Say "No" to peace,  
if what they mean by peace  
is a rampart of gleaming missiles,  
the arming of distant wars,  
money at ease in its castle,  
and grateful poor at the gate.

Tell them that peace  
is the hauling down of flags,  
the forging of guns into ploughs,  
the giving of fields to the landless,  
and hunger a fading dream.



Brian Wren's poem has something important to say specifically in the face of the issues we're exploring today. Peace is not the absence of fighting. Peace is not the cowed existence of those who are controlled, gas-lighted or robbed of their ability to think for themselves. Peace is not the imposition of a constant threat of violence or the sapping of a community's will to resist. A peace without any uproar is not biblical peace, because true peace is a fruit both of justice and of the action of the Spirit, who blows where She will. There's something disturbing, unsettling, change-making about real peace, for it is about restored relationships, mutual respect, making room for the other and their dreams; about a trust that each person and each culture has not only an intrinsic God-given value but also a unique contribution to make, a gift to share for the good of all. Peace is the enabling of that sharing.

The Children of Abraham have a great story to tell when it comes to peace, especially peace in personal relationships. It's there in Genesis 1. Male and female we were created, in the image and likeness of God, made for mutuality, endowed with complementarity. We are the summit of God's creative oeuvre - adding the 'very good' to the merely 'good' of the fruits of the previous five days of Creation, whatever the ambiguities implicit in our 'dominion' over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea and the creatures of the land, ambiguities vividly displayed in the ecological crisis of our days.

The second Genesis creation myth describes the uniqueness of our being, in the admixture of earth and air, flesh and spirit together, and names the erotic relationship, too: Eve is taken from the side of Adam to satisfy a need which can never be satisfied by mere objects. Adam finds real delight only in the recognition: "'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ...' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Gen 2.23-24) Jesus used that last text to express his own theology of marriage, adding the conclusion: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mk 10.8-9)

That's the positive Judaeo-Christian image of Marriage and Eros - the delight in the other, the desire for the other, the honouring of the other, and the consequent creation of a shared identity and vocation.

But there's a darker side to the history of human intimacy, expressed in Genesis 3: the eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has various destructive effects. The couple firstly discover shame, the realisation that nakedness is problematic. Then they resort to mutual accusation ("The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." - Gen 3.12) and then finally their relationships both to the natural world and to each other are poisoned: "To the woman God said, ' ... in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' And to the man God said, ' ... cursed is the ground because of you; ... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken ...'" (Gen 3.16-19)

If we want to create a world at peace, we really need to take seriously the flawed and conflictual nature of our being. Remember that myth tells us what is always and everywhere the case. The story-book language may be hard for our rationalist heads to absorb but if we insist on saying that we're all 'reasonable people', free of the capacity to do deeply evil things, we are very ill-equipped to think our way beyond those primal urges or to create a society in which those dark forces are confronted and tamed in a healthy manner.

Quite properly, we do not want to label children as 'bad' or 'naughty'. In reaction to past disciplinarianism, we may be tempted to idealise them, as "naturally good." They are, but they are also manipulative, calculating, dedicated to ensuring their own needs are met and prone to evading responsibility for their actions - in other words, flawed and 'fallen', just like the rest of us. That, rather than wrong actions, is the truth expressed by the term 'Original Sin'. And not all disciplining of children can be based on asking them whether they "made a wise decision."

That leads me to my second question: Are we Christians part of the solution or part of the problem when it comes to issues of domestic violence and social order? We certainly talk a good talk. We hold up a shining ideal of what marriage should be and how families should be and how societies should be, and yet for most of its history the Church has tolerated slavery, denied female autonomy and had a strong urge to cover up sexual abuse in order to protect the institution's 'good name'. How did the wonderful vision of human flourishing in the Scriptures become so poisoned? Sin (with a capital 'S') and Fallen-ness again.

One mistake we make is to deny the differences between ancient and modern worldviews and mores. When it comes to marriage, blithely to apply the categories derived from a clan-based system of arranged marriages (in which the woman had little autonomy - and no possibility, in extremis, of leaving) to contemporary relationships based on mutual attraction, personal autonomy and legal equality is, to say the least, problematic. What was once the 'glue' of the relationship and (when it worked) a safeguard for the woman - namely family honour combined with societal expectation of fidelity - has very little adhesive quality in a secular society which presumes people will have multiple sexual partners across their (now significantly longer) lifetimes and where 'honour' is not a key motivator. In our culture the vision of a vocation to "become one flesh", the calling which Jesus himself offered, has to be taught as a freely adopted spiritual path, an asceticism. Our young (and not-so-young) have to be shown that its possibility depends on a decision to live by counter-cultural values and to build life together on a spiritual foundation.

It took the Catholic Church until Vatican II to embrace 'Covenant', rather than 'Contract', as the key category in understanding human loving, with God's relationship with Israel as the paradigm for Christian marriage. A covenantal model sees life together as a journey, a journey marked by growth, change, failure and forgiveness, with new beginnings after each betrayal. It has much to commend it. It is hope-filled and future-oriented, allowing us to transcend past limitations. It moves beyond talk of 'rights' and 'duties' to talk of mutuality and a shared life. The limitation is that God's

Covenantal Love is, by definition, eternal, able to start over after every betrayal - whereas human relationships can sometimes reach a pass where the covenant is irredeemably betrayed and an abused partner has - one could even say - a duty to leave.

We would do well to spend time with the woman at the well in Samaria in Jn 4, the woman who - as Jesus tells her - has had five husbands (and the one she is with now is not her husband). She could not divorce any of those men. Rather, she is a multiple victim of abusive relationships, one who has been put on the discard pile of life, with her social standing (and presumably her self-esteem) reduced with each subsequent eviction from the family unit. Jesus is probably the first person in her entire life to treat her as an equal, to engage with her opinions, and then to give her 'living water', something to satisfy her search for a sense of self and a sense of worth. He is probably the first man since her first wedding day not to shame or belittle or gaslight her. She goes home that night to sleep with husband number five (or is it six?) not as a sinner but as an apostle: "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" (Jn 4.29) What had been a burden and a dirty little secret becomes a source of life. She is given back her community and becomes someone able to speak with authority to her neighbours, instead of hiding from them by coming to the well-head at noon. She is un-shamed, un-condemned, given her life back.

That is the task of the 'Field Hospital Church' of which Pope Francis speaks so movingly: to listen to people's hearts and to dress their wounds - which are many and deep, perhaps especially in their personal relationships and their family life - and then to mission them to live from the place of forgiveness. "The name of God is mercy," as Pope Francis reminded us by the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of 2016. And the experience of mercy requires of us that we confess our woundedness in order then to educate ourselves (and the next generation, too) to eschew power-play and the abuse of authority over each other - both the explicit language of threat and the unspoken gestures of passive-aggression. We each need to do 'Soul work' to prevent yesterday's wounds becoming tomorrow's wrongs - and the Christian community needs to unpack the tools our Tradition has given us to bring about this transformation.

God's love is profoundly realistic, recognising our limitation and working to build something beautiful out of our brokenness. "For [as St Paul discovered at his own conversion] it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2 Cor 4.7-8) "There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in", as Leonard Cohen understood.

When we turn from the domestic to the political and the international (and I really haven't time to explore this in the way it deserves) we find some of the same features - a brilliant set of resources, a noble discourse, and almost universal failure to live up to it. On the one hand, not only do we have the sixth commandment but Jesus' radicalisation of it in the Matthean Antitheses, whereby angry and murderous thoughts are said to be as worthy of punishment as homicide and where, awkwardly, we are bidden to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. (Mt 5.21-2, 38-45) In the Beatitudes we have the promise, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Mt 5.9) In the Old Testament we have the prophetic injunction to beat swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isa 2.4) and the promise that in the days of the Messiah "The wolf shall live with the lamb." (Isa 11.6) And in Psalm 46 we are bidden to be still and know the God who "makes wars cease to the end of the earth ..." (Ps 46.9)

And then we have the lived reality of Constantine saying of the cross, "In this sign I have my victory," and the many ways through history that Throne and Altar have become an oppressive alliance. We have the painful memories of both Crusaders and Conquistadores undertaking land-grabs and indiscriminate killing "for the greater glory of God." In 2019 Westminster Abbey hosted a service to celebrate 50 years of this country's continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent without questioning our willingness to wreak destruction of innocent lives and of the biosphere on such a scale that human life might cease to be viable.

We have in our Tradition the elaboration of 'Just War' theory - a way of reasoning which, while it may have limited violence at times (though clearly neither in Gaza at present nor in the carpet-bombing of Germany in World War Two) has proved singularly unable to protect non-combatants, let alone actually to prevent wars. In fact, the language of 'Just War' has often been used to baptise existing conflicts as a struggle between our own perceived good and our opponents' named evils. But no war can be 'just' in any deep sense. War is always a failure of the human spirit, a betrayal of hope, an obstacle to the right relationship that the peace of Christ invites us to pursue. It always leads to fresh injustices and new hatreds. "In war, everyone loses," as Pope Francis has repeatedly insisted.

Perhaps, as with the case of personal relationships the healthy response for the Church is, firstly, to recognise and name the sinful nature of our reality - and our own implication in that fault; in other words, the path of confession and metanoia (conversion). Secondly, we need to seek alternatives to the resigned acceptance of violence as an inevitability in human affairs. We have to create oases of reconciliation, examples of other ways of resolving conflict, projects that

make the possibility of peace tangible and the search for peace urgent. We are bidden to seek first the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness. (Mt 6.33) Loving our neighbours is what we are about - and in the story of the Good Samaritan we discover to our horror that our enemy is also our neighbour. When we finally understand that, we shall also "know that the Kingdom of God is among [us]." (Lk 17.21)

Meanwhile, "Say "No" to peace if what they mean by peace is the quiet misery of hunger, the frozen stillness of fear, the silence of broken spirits, the unborn hopes of the oppressed."

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49085>

## STELLA MARIS ESTABLISHES CROSS-SECTOR STEERING GROUP TO HELP TACKLE MODERN SLAVERY IN UK PORTS

30 January 2024 **Source:** Stella Maris

Stella Maris is taking proactive measures in the fight against modern slavery with the establishment of a dedicated Steering Group. The group comprises 23 individuals representing a spectrum of stakeholders, including ferry operators, port businesses, recruitment agencies, port owners, port authorities, charities, Border Force, and the police. It aims to build on the success of Stella Maris' recent Modern Slavery Identification and Awareness workshops and create a comprehensive action plan to help address modern slavery UK ports.

Stella Maris partnered with Align Ltd in 2023 to hold six Modern Slavery Identification and Awareness workshops led by an expert panel and those with Lived Experience of the issue. The workshops, funded by the Department for Transport through the Merchant Navy Welfare Board, explored critical aspects of modern slavery prevention, indicators of exploitation, risk reduction strategies, emerging threats, and access to support networks for survivors.

Pre- and post-workshop surveys provided valuable insights. Highlighting the scale of the issue, 52% of participants revealed that they were aware of modern slavery victims being identified within or by their organisation, and 60% expressed concerns about potential exploitation in their supply chains.

The workshops identified five key challenges faced by the maritime sector in combating modern slavery and human trafficking:

1. Lack of Awareness and Knowledge
2. Difficulty in Identifying Victims
3. Challenges in Reporting and Sharing Information
4. Trust and Communication Issues
5. Organisational and Leadership Challenges.

Responding to these challenges, Stella Maris and Align Ltd have formed the Steering Group to catalyse positive change within the sector.

Mark Gibbens, Head of Logistics at Drax Power Limited, expressed his commitment to the issue, stating: "My company operates a global supply chain, and the workshop has inspired me to join the Stella Maris Steering Group in 2024 to use our position of privilege to promote greater awareness of modern slavery, and to be proactive in improving our industry."

Tim Hill MBE, Stella Maris CEO and National Director, emphasised the significance of the initiative, saying: "With over half of the workshop participants being aware of modern slavery victims being identified within or by their organisation, it's clear this is a big issue for the maritime sector. The steering group, bringing together diverse perspectives from across the port infrastructure, provides a great opportunity to create a comprehensive and effective action plan for lasting change."

The first Steering Group meeting was held on January 24th and marked a significant milestone in the collaborative effort to help combat modern slavery in UK ports.

*Stella Maris, (formerly known as Apostleship of the Sea), is a registered UK charity. It relies on voluntary donations to continue its work. 90% of world trade is transported by ship. However, the life of a seafarer can be dangerous and lonely. Seafarers may spend up to a year at a time away from home, separated from their families and loved ones, often working in harsh conditions. Stella Maris' chaplains and ship visitors provide seafarers and fishers with pastoral and practical support, information and a listening ear.*

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49025>

**For more information visit:** [www.stellamaris.org.uk](http://www.stellamaris.org.uk)



## UK CATHOLICS CALL ON CHANCELLOR TO TACKLE POVERTY

29 January 2024 **Source: Catholic Union**

Leading Catholic organisations across the UK have called on the Chancellor to focus on tackling poverty ahead of the Spring Budget this year.

Catholic Bishops in England, and Wales, and Scotland along with CAFOD, CSAN, and the Catholic Union of Great Britain have written to the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, calling on him to "put tackling poverty at the heart" of the next Budget, which is due to take place on 6 March.

In what is likely to be the last Budget before the next General Election, Catholic organisations have made a joint representation to the Treasury on the need to help people escape poverty both at home and abroad.

The letter contains a number of policy suggestions, including the need for a fairer tax and benefit system and restoring the overseas aid budget to 0.7% of GNI as promised by the Government at the last election.

The joint letter between Catholic Bishops and lay groups is the first of its kind and shows the "deep concern" that exists within the Catholic community for the poorest in society.

The letter also calls for the Budget proposals to be assessed in relation to poverty metrics to make sure that any changes to tax and spending will benefit those on the margins of society.

Christine Allen, Director of CAFOD, comments: "Pope Francis has implored politicians and leaders to ensure that people living in poverty don't end up as an 'afterthought' in their decisions. We know that Catholics throughout the country in this election year will be urging the Chancellor and all political leaders to set out policies that help people escape poverty - both here at home and around the world."

Bishop Brian McGee, Bishop President of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, comments: "When I travel with SCIAF I meet many people who are desperately poor. These are not to be passed over as anonymous and faceless. Each one is a human being, our sister or brother who deserves not only to be helped but justice."

James Somerville-Meikle, Catholic Union Deputy Director, comments: "There has been a great deal of speculation already about what the next Budget will contain. We strongly urge the Chancellor to use what may well be the last Budget before the next General Election to focus on the common good. Tackling poverty is something which Catholics care deeply about. This letter is a great sign of unity from the Catholic community in this country and sends a strong message that concern for the poorest in society needs to be front and centre of this next Budget."

A consultation ahead of the Spring Budget 2024 closed on 24 January. **More information can be found here:** [www.gov.uk/government/publications/spring-budget-2024-representations](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spring-budget-2024-representations)

### **The full text of the joint letter follows:**

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP Chancellor of the Exchequer, HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ  
24 January 2024  
Dear Chancellor

We are writing to ask that you put tackling poverty at the heart of your Spring Budget.

The Catholic groups and organisations we represent have a deep concern for the poorest in society, both in this country and around the world.

This concern is rooted in our faith and the teachings of the Catholic Church. In Pope Francis's most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, he writes: "Amid the daily concerns of political life, the smallest, the weakest, the poorest should touch our hearts: indeed, they have a 'right' to appeal to our heart and soul."

This is why we have come together to make this joint submission. Ahead of what is likely to be the last Budget before the next General Election, we urge you to focus on helping people escape poverty so they can live in dignity.

At home, this means making changes to our tax and benefit system to help families keep more of the money they earn and support those most in need.

This should include finally lifting the two-child cap on Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits; a policy which a parliamentary inquiry found had "evident, unintended consequences that no Government should be willing to accept".

Internationally, this should include returning our overseas aid budget to 0.7% of GNI in line with the commitment made in your manifesto at the last General Election. Support should also be provided by the Treasury working towards debt-relief for low-income countries that need it.

This overseas aid budget should be used to promote integral human development amongst the world's poorest. This money was never intended to be used supporting those seeking asylum in this country. Nor should it be spent without regard to a country's human rights record.

At the Budget last year, there was barely any mention of efforts to tackle poverty. We strongly encourage you to make poverty reduction central to your next Budget and encourage you to publish an impact assessment of your policies in relation to poverty metrics.

Catholic churches and charities are at the forefront of efforts to support people on the margins of society. We see the needs of the communities where we live and serve on a daily basis. We would be happy to meet you ahead of the Budget to discuss ways of reducing poverty.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Christine Allen Director, CAFOD; Bishop Brian McGee Bishop President, SCIAF; Raymond Friel OBE Chief Executive, CSAN; Archbishop William Nolan Bishop President, Justice & Peace Scotland; Bishop Richard Moth Chair Department of Social Justice CBCEW; Nigel Parker Director, Catholic Union of Great Britain

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49017>

## **MICHAEL PALIN BACKS NEW PLAN TO SAVE UK CHURCHES**

24 January 2024: A manifesto calling for urgent action to save the UK's church buildings has been launched by the National Churches Trust, the UK's church buildings support charity. With over 3,500 churches having shut their doors for good since 2013 and many more now facing closure, 'Every Church Counts', sets out six key actions needed to save the UK's church buildings.

These are:

- A network of professional support officers to help the heroic volunteers and clergy who look after church buildings.
- Boosting the UK's church-based 'National Help Service' by basing more community support services in church buildings.
- Additional public funding of £50 million to help save church heritage for the future; a national matched funding scheme to incentivise charitable giving is also proposed, with the value of donations doubled.
- A strategy to increase tourism to historic churches, including more UNESCO world heritage site designations, for example for the wool churches of Norfolk or Suffolk and the early Christian sites of Wales and Northern Britain.
- Regular opening of churches beyond worship times, including seven day a week opening where possible.
- Urgent action by Government, heritage organisations and denominations, including the development of a national plan.

Sir Michael Palin, Vice-President of the National Churches Trust said: "Right now, many church buildings are in danger of closure. 'Every Church Counts' proposes a range of ways in which the future of the UK's churches, chapels and meeting houses can be secured.



More and more churches are adapting to the needs of their communities, providing not just spiritual comfort but a range of valuable services to local people such as foodbanks and warm spaces and helping to combat the scourge of loneliness. Churches are also a vital and much-loved part of the UK's history and we need to act now to prevent the loss of tremendously important local heritage. If you care as much about the future of these much-loved buildings as I do, you'll find that the National Churches Trust's 'Every Church Counts' offers a way forward for these wonderful buildings."

Claire Walker, CEO of the National Churches Trust said: " 'Every Church Counts' offers a blueprint of how churches can be saved for the future. With hundreds facing closure, a national plan is urgently needed to help secure their future. We are calling on Government, heritage organisations and Christian denominations to work together to tackle what is the UK's single biggest heritage challenge.

With so many churches offering vitally important community services, from food banks to warm spaces, they provide what is in effect the UK's National Help Service, crucial to the social and economic wellbeing of millions of people. Keeping churches open means that support for the vulnerable can continue, especially important in more deprived areas. In the coming months we will work with our partners to see how the ideas in 'Every Church Counts' can be implemented so that the UK's wonderful inheritance of church buildings can continue to benefit local communities and the nation as a whole."

Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair of the National Churches Trust said: "Our vision is that church buildings across the UK remain open, in good repair with their heritage secure and being used for worship and community use. With over 38,500 church buildings, no single actor can fix the problem: action is needed by churches locally, denominations nationally, and by heritage organisations and Government itself. With an increasing number of churches threatened with closure, a national plan is urgently needed to help secure the long-term future of the UK's church buildings. 'Every Church Counts' puts forward six ideas to lead thinking and stimulate debate.

One of the recommendations we make is for more funding for church buildings. Repairing the roof of a historic church can cost well over half a million pounds. Although congregations raise a great deal of money locally, more financial support is urgently needed to help safeguard what is nationally important heritage. More support is especially needed for churches in more deprived areas, such as inner cities and coastal towns. These churches often do a tremendous amount to support local people, but struggle to raise money to repair buildings, with many facing closure. Through a Government supported match funding scheme, more money can also be raised from the many people who love churches."

'Every Church Counts' was launched at a reception in the Attlee Room in the House of Lords hosted by Lord Cormack and attended by MPs, Peers and church and heritage leaders, on Wednesday 24 January, 2024.

Those attending included Lord Parkinson, the Heritage Minister, Baroness Sherlock, Shadow Minister for Faith, Simon Thurley, Chair of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Rt Rev Dr Andrew Rumsey, Bishop of Ramsbury and Co-lead for Church Buildings and Cathedrals for the Church of England, Sophie Andreae, Vice-chair of the Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Bishops Conference for England and Wales, and representatives of the Quakers, Baptists, and the Church of Scotland.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48986>

**For more information see:** [www.nationalchurchestrust.org/everychurchcounts](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/everychurchcounts)

## VOCATION FOR JUSTICE SPRING 2024: OUR RIGHT TO PROTEST

**Ellen Teague** 26 January 2024

The Spring 2024 edition of 'Vocation for Justice' - the Columban newsletter for Justice, Peace and Ecology - focuses on the right to protest.

On the cover are photos of Columbans and colleagues carrying banners, 'Stand with the Pope, Stand up to Fossil Fuels' and 'Save our Earth' at marches in London and Birmingham on 9 December 2023 to support Climate Action at the COP28 UN Climate talks.

Many of us have felt alarm in recent months at the UK government's response to protests regarding conflict in the Holy Land, refugee policy and towards strikes by trade unionists. Confusion has been sown about the law, creating uncertainty about what consequences people might face for taking to the streets. Some are discouraged by fear of arrest.

Yet during a time of escalating global conflict and inequality at home and overseas, it is more important than ever that our decision makers are accessible and accountable to the public. Undemocratic threats and the criminalisation of protest must be challenged. Campaigns suggested for support include the work of the Quaker Truth and Integrity Group and the Global Justice campaign 'End Corporate Impunity'. Also, Liberty's challenge to anti-protest legislation. Legislation - such as Public Order Act 2023 - has clamped down on protest, giving the police new powers to restrict demonstrations and creating new offences that specifically target types of protest.

We gather to mourn, express anger and demand change in response to national or world events. The ability to stand up for what we believe in is a fundamental right - one that all of us, no matter what causes move us, hold dear. And it is essential to a healthy and functioning democracy, helping force politicians to listen ... even though they often don't appear to! Protest is also a vital safety valve, giving people an outlet for their emotions, whether about the UK government awarding new North Sea oil and gas licences, the cost-of-living crisis, UK refugee policy, or the killing of civilians in Gaza.

Faith groups - such as Religious Links and the National Justice and Peace Network - have long promoted integrity in public life, the value of hope and the importance of helping marginalised communities dream of a better future. And, of course, protest in all its forms - from signing petitions, to lobbying our MPs, to raising awareness of issues. We must sidestep misguided claims of "being too political". For Catholics there is plenty of Catholic Social Teaching to quote from. And in the latest papal exhortation '*Laudate Deum*' Pope Francis stressed the vital role of radical nonviolent action. Democracy, along with human and environmental rights, is hard to win and easy to lose. Let us remember this as we plan for the next General Election later this year.

In addition, the newsletter reminds that our 2024 Schools Media Competition 'Biodiversity Matters' closes on 17 February. Please alert young people 13-18 that they are invited to submit a piece of writing or image.

**View the Spring 2024 Vocation for Justice at:** <https://columbans.co.uk/justice-peace/13542/vocation-for-justice-spring-2024-our-right-to-protest/>

This includes a short video overview of the Columban Schools Competition since 2018.

**Schools Competition 2024 website for Information and Entry Details at:** [www.columbancompetition.com/](http://www.columbancompetition.com/)  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/48996>

## IAN LINDEN: GOVERNANCE & THE POST OFFICE SCANDAL

### Reviewing Rory Stewart's book *Politics on the Edge: A Memoir from Within*

22 January 2024: "An excoriating picture of a shamefully dysfunctional political culture". Not a comment on the recent ITV series Mr. Bates vs. The Post Office. This is Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, on the back cover of Rory Stewart's *Politics on the Edge: A Memoir from Within* Jonathan Cape 2023. Yet the book exposes the profound weaknesses in governance that enabled the Post Office scandal.

Stewart's book focuses on the story of his decade in Tory politics and government from 2009-2019. Peter Hennessy, crossbench peer and constitutional historian, described it as 'a study in pain and disillusionment.' Michael Ignatieff, former Liberal Party leader of the Opposition in Canada and distinguished academic, spoke of its portrayal of 'lying, incompetence and treachery'. These three reviewers are all accomplished authors. Two bring exceptional political experience to their writing. Stewart's account carries conviction with those who ought to know.

The book provides an explanation for how government can speak of appointing 150 additional judges to speed up the deportation of asylum seekers and migrants to Rwanda, judged an unsafe country by our Courts, whilst, allegedly through lack of staff, taking many years to process compensation for unsafe convictions of sub postmasters and mistresses, pillars of the community.

Rory Stewart shares many of his reviewers' writing skills keeping the reader turning the pages as he talks about his epic walks in Asia and the Middle East and his professional life as a soldier before entering politics. There are insights from his different roles in Afghanistan, the group think and disastrous levels of conviction bias that ended in the bungled evacuation from Kabul in August 2021.

Maybe he is one of those "unpatriotic, Britain-belittling doom-mongers". This is from a recent Lancaster House speech by our Secretary of State for Defence, Grant Shapps, rated as one of the government's best communicators, who in the past communicated using four different names and whose political career recently included, within two years, four different Ministries. Or put in another way, Stewart tries to tell the truth about politicians like Shapps and knows what he's talking about.

*Politics on the Edge* is not just a litany of lying and dysfunction. There are witty descriptions of the humiliations involved in getting selected for a parliamentary constituency while failing to present always the Party line. Then follows the main story of the rocky road he walked as a Member of Parliament.

His first boss, David Cameron, gets few praise-notes. Despite practical steps to increase diversity in the Party, the members of Cameron's inner circle were Etonians (like Stewart himself), so policy was decided by 'an unimaginably narrow social group'. Stewart shows considerable self-awareness acknowledging the greasy pole Cameron had to climb to become Prime Minister. But he and Cameron were chalk and cheese.

A common criticism of Rory Stewart is that he was, and remains, 'naive'. At first, he lacked knowledge and experience of the snakes and ladders of political life, but he brought to the job the wisdom and judgement he had developed in different contexts. At times acting out of conscience without being, Corbyn-style, a professionally disloyal parliamentarian he risks defying the Tory Whips. By the time Boris Johnson pushed him out of Conservative politics in 2019 he had become a national figure.

In contrast to *Yes Minister's* portrayal some may even find his treatment of top civil servants to be too understanding and benign. They keep things going while Ministers come and go but they can be stubborn and evasive – at times successfully resisting policy change. Stewart found the power relations in the Department for International Development, as both Minister and as Secretary of State, particularly trying. While acknowledging the important role of aid in the global projection of the UK and giving Cameron credit for his commitment to 0.7% GDP, he encourages the suspicion that the department with an annual budget of "£13 billion more than ten times the core budget of the British Foreign Office" was a little too big for its boots. Yes, but the Foreign Office is not a Ministry funding projects globally. And DFID and FCO were of course later amalgamated by Johnson with hostile intent

Stewart got on well with Theresa May who made him a rather reluctant Minister of State for prisons in the Ministry of Justice. This is where his passion for practical action best shines out. Prisoners are grabbing drugs delivered by drones hovering outside broken windows – mend the broken windows, do a few simple reforms. Reading Stewart's account of prison conditions and their neglect by government is deeply shaming. It raises questions about our claim to be a civilised society. And in parenthesis, the absence of any mention of conversations with prison chaplains by such an advocate of 'listening' is some measure of his – admitted - general distaste for religion.

The least interesting chapters of *Politics on the Edge* are those about the quagmire of Brexit negotiations though, as did many others, Stewart soon spots Boris Johnson for the charlatan he is. After the resignation of Theresa May, his blow-by-blow account of the live TV debate in June 2019 trying to come through an experienced field of four other Tory leadership contenders - Johnson didn't take part – and detailing his own miserable performance, is a painful study in hubris.

What, as Lenin said, is to be done? Stewart doesn't offer any coherent plan for reforming politics. Nor is there an obvious solution to offer. But he is clearly right that Ministers need time to understand the complexities of the issues they face, even what issues they must face. Successive Ministers responsible for the Post Office failed or were unable to challenge the Post Office's entrenched hierarchy. Appointing Secretaries of State for a three-year term, barring incompetence, would be helpful.

Party leaderships also perhaps need to allow more unwhipped votes. Differences can be creative. All Parties need to join in countering manufactured public opinion that disagreement always indicates a divided Party not fit for government. Politics as a conscience-free, value-free zone of human endeavour isn't desirable, hasn't worked and doesn't work. It lies behind our worst national scandals. Fortunately, not all politicians practice it.

Does Rory Stewart provide a necessary prophetic voice or an irritatingly arrogant one? It hardly matters how he comes across as a person. Our politics is on the edge. Not yet teetering over it as in the USA. There are two ways to travel when approaching the edge: away from it or over it. And not moving, paralysed by disillusion, or providing ever new descriptions and analyses of the problems rather than doing something about them, as Tony Blair once put it, leaves you dangerously near the edge.

I hope *Politics on the Edge* is not Stewart's political swansong. We need alternative voices. Having shed his illusions, perhaps he should try again, this time in the Labour Party.

<https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/archives/01-2024>

We've been passing this book around the family. A superb insight into the political system – Ed.

## BOARBANK HALL PROGRAMME FOR 2024

### **Thinking Faith Lent Zoom weekend**

8-10 March. Evening sessions only. Theme: Fasting and Feasting  
Time out for working Catholics

### **Two Wings and Some Prayers Five nights**

13th-18th May. Week of prayer, walks and birdwatching, with a focus on learning birdsong.

### **Living Laudato Si' Residential week**

25th May-1st June. A week to explore how to live out *Laudato Si'* fully in our personal lives and within the Church. All welcome.

### **Catholic Social Teaching Residential weekend**

28th June-1st July. Theme: Revisiting the Basics.

A long weekend to revisit the basic ideas and some key texts of Catholic Social Teaching. Would suit especially anyone involved in work in Justice & Peace, Care for Creation, or with young people. All welcome.

### **Thinking Faith Summer residential week**

Date 27th July - 3rd August 2024. Theme: What Catholics *Really* Believe  
Time out for working Catholics (see also other Thinking Faith event).

### **Living Laudato Si' Residential week**

5th-12th October. A week to explore how to live out *Laudato Si'* fully in our personal lives and within the Church. All welcome.

We welcome bookings from parish, school or student groups or any other groups who may benefit from our hospitality. We also work with schools to provide INSET days to suit each school, with the option of overnight stays. All our residential events combine talks and discussions with Mass, Prayer of the Church and opportunity for personal prayer, in a context of friendship and community in our beautiful Cumbrian setting beside Morecambe Bay. Any group who would like help in arranging a programme or speakers for any kind of retreat or residential event should contact Sr Margaret Atkins on [margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk](mailto:margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk) or 015395-32288

**Boarbank Hall**, Allithwaite, Grange Over Sands, Cumbria, LA11 7NH [www.boarbankhall.org.uk](http://www.boarbankhall.org.uk)

## 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 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/>

**Read:** A new analysis in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) flagship UK Poverty report quantifies for the first time how many thousands of pounds are needed by families to escape poverty – and how that has got worse over time. It is now 20 years and 6 prime ministers since there was a sustained fall in poverty.

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

## STATIONS OF THE CROSS

### 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://jipshrewsbury.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/ecological-way-of-the-cross-2022.pdf>

**Lent reflections:** <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/resources/lent-reflection-resources-2024/>

### 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.



© Jon Swales, 2020

Rev Jon Swales is Lighthouse  
Mission Priest for Leeds



## DIARY

### FEBRUARY

**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/](http://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-and-peace.org.uk](mailto:admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk)

### MARCH

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

**8 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

**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](mailto:margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk), or visit our website: [www.boarbankhall.org.uk](http://www.boarbankhall.org.uk)

### MAY

**11 NJPN Annual General Meeting** at Romero House, London. For more information contact [admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk](mailto: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.

**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](mailto: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/campaigns/njpn-e-bulletin-21st-january-2024/>

● **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](http://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk) or contact [ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org](mailto:ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org) or [admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk](mailto: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](http://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*