

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)

## GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES NEW DEFINITION OF EXTREMISM

**Ruth Peacock Religion Media Centre** 15 March 2024: The Communities Secretary Michael Gove has announced a new definition of extremism which will block groups from government funding and engagement:

**Extremism is “the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to:**  
**1. negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others;**  
**or 2. undermine, overturn or replace the UK’s system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights;**  
**or 3. intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2)”**

Mr Gove told the Commons that five groups have already been listed to be assessed by a “counter-extremism centre of excellence” within the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Three were included for their Islamist orientation and views: the Muslim Association of Britain <sup>1</sup>, Cage <sup>2</sup> and MEND <sup>3</sup> (Muslim Engagement and Development). A further two promote Neo-Nazi ideology, the British National Socialist Movement and Patriotic Alternative. He said “Our definition will not affect gender-critical campaigners, those with conservative religious beliefs, trans activists, environmental protest groups, or those exercising their proper right to free speech”.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mabonline.net/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cage.ngo/articles/joint-statement-michael-gove-s-extremism-announcement-is-an-authoritarian-threat-to-society-that-we-will-resist>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mend.org.uk/mend-calls-for-rejection-of-goves-new-extremist-definition/>

**“The risk of alienating entire communities cannot be overstated”:** Zara Mohammed, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, writing for Metro <sup>4</sup>, said all should be united in opposing harm from extremism, but the new definition hinders this common objective. “The risk of alienating entire communities through these arbitrary categorisations cannot be overstated. This definition will undoubtedly undermine efforts to foster unity and mutual understanding within society”. She spoke of the impact on her organisation which was not listed: “For weeks now, our organisation has been subject to smears and insinuation that we would be judged against this extremism criteria as well. If we did, it would mean that the hundreds of mosques and Islamic associations affiliated to us – and the hundreds of thousands of those attending these institutions – would all be tarred with this offensive brush. And that is a huge problem”.

<sup>4</sup> <https://metro.co.uk/2024/03/14/organisation-helps-muslims-now-considered-extremists-20466639/>

**Board of Deputies weighs in after suggestions the government’s independent adviser on antisemitism will be dismissed:** The Board of Deputies has written to Michael Gove to support Lord Mann as the government’s independent adviser on antisemitism, after rumours emerged that he would not be extended when his five-year role ends this year. Jewish News <sup>5</sup> reports that the letter written by the Board of Deputies president Marie van der Zyl said Lord Mann had “overwhelming support” within the Jewish community: “at a time when our community is so distressed by the sheer amounts of Jew-hatred in the UK at this time... it would be a retrograde step to dismiss Lord Mann.”

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/board-president-warns-gove-it-would-be-a-retrograde-step-to-dismiss-lord-mann/>

**Women of faith launch project to bridge community divides:** The Women’s Interfaith Network has launched a project called “Keeping Faith” <sup>6</sup>, designed to bring together women from all faiths and backgrounds to build stronger communities. It will include key events, a new podcast and a book of reflections. The Network’s co-founder and chair, Lady Gilda Levy, said it was started 20 years ago after 9/11, and little seems to have changed. With religious hate crime and community tensions heightened, the Network hopes to provide space for interfaith dialogue to find points of connection and meaning.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wominet.org.uk/2024/03/announcing-the-2024-keeping-faith-programme/>

**LINK:** <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/religion-news-15-march-2024/>

- The Religion Media Centre is an impartial and independent organization aiming to increase further cohesion and understanding in society by helping the media report and understand religion and belief. It does not promote any one religion or belief and has no editorial line other than religion matters. Instead, it exists to provide accurate, timely and relevant information to the media, enabling the public to be better informed. We believe that at a time when society is so deeply divided, with social media fuelling division and hatred, encouraged by extreme ideologies, the imperative for our work has never been greater. Our goals are to affect greater understanding in society through amplifying the voice of people whose faith and beliefs impel them to seek the common good; to improve religious literacy among journalists, media professionals and the wider public; to enable religious organizations and faith leaders to work with the media.

## REFLECTION FOR HOME OFFICE VIGIL: NOT CASTING STONES

**Barbara Kentish** 18 March 2024: We come here month after month, to pray for asylum seekers and to mark the deaths of those whom the system has failed. We pray, like the importunate widow, each time, for justice for refugees, for a welcome for these strangers. What more can we be doing that we are not already doing?

I thought about today's reading, and the woman who apparently deserved stoning, and Jesus's reluctant conclusion: 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.'

I wonder if there is a danger that we can look as though we are blaming government for all the ills of the asylum and immigration system. Yet we have a tiny part to play. We are here as Christians, but also as citizens, who have a degree of freedom of speech, the right to assemble, the right to share our views, although we know that all of these cannot be taken for granted. And a vote. We have an election coming up, probably in the Autumn. Our message, month after month, is surely that a politics of compassion must be applied to the whole asylum system. This system is national, European and global, and the crisis of people on the move needs to be seen as a huge humanitarian crisis. This was done after the Second World War, but also after the Vietnam war, when more than 1.3 million people were resettled.

I looked up some suggestions for policy, and found on Amnesty International site the following eight pointers:

- 1) Safe routes to sanctuary
  - 2) Resettle most vulnerable
  - 3) Save lives
  - 4) Crossing borders: allow people to cross borders without papers, as they flee from danger
  - 5) Stop trafficking
  - 6) Stop blaming refugees for domestic problems
- Governments need to stop blaming refugees and migrants for economic and social problems, and instead combat all kinds of xenophobia and racial discrimination.
- 7) Start funding an impoverished UN, which has not even enough money to deal with the famine crisis in the Sudan for instance
  - 8) Asylum is a human right

The world has a very short memory. In the aftermath of World War II, most countries agreed to protect refugees through the 1951 Refugee Convention, and through UN agencies like the UNHCR. Barbed wire fences and chronic underfunding have left that vision of a better world in tatters. By ignoring the warning signs, world leaders have allowed a huge, global humanitarian crisis to unfold. Ultimately, it will be resolved by ending the conflicts and persecution that forced people to flee in the first place. But no one knows when that will be. Meanwhile, we need radical solutions, visionary leadership and global co-operation on a scale not seen for 70 years. That involves setting up strong refugee systems: allowing people to apply for asylum, treating their refugee claims fairly, resettling the most vulnerable of all, and providing basics like education and healthcare.

None of these eight solutions are impossible to achieve, if politicians listen to the millions of people saying "refugees welcome", and put solidarity and compassion above petty wrangling over who should host a few thousand refugees'. My own thoughts on the local domestic level are obvious:

- Stop throwing money at walls and fences and spend it instead on improving the claims system, using the money to enable the - Home Office to deal with the huge backlog of applications.
- Stop putting people in detention for indefinite periods, treating them like prisoners, and instead let them go out to work, including while they await a hearing of their applications.

As Simon Jenkins of the Guardian says: 'Our plight is rich in absurdity. The UK needs new workers and people want to come here. The real problem is populist politics.' In other words, the fears planted in people about invasion by strangers is simply a tool of a party faction using biased media, and should be dealt with as such. But overall, as Clive Myrie, of the BBC says: 'we need international cooperation to solve a global crisis'. Which brings me to the central idea behind all of these measures: Compassion and humanity.

The theme for Refugee Week this year is Compassion. What we are doing here in Marsham Street is praying for an international politics of compassion. And whatever we are getting involved in, whether hospitality, campaigning, accompaniment or befriending, we are praying that the umbrella idea over all of it, is compassion, not numbers, not expediency, identity politics or anything else. The alternative is the deaths we have just heard read out. It does not have to be like this. With a general election coming up, might we think of doing our part, and coming up with a sort of Charter of Compassion for refugees, Might we do our own writing on the ground, as to what to put forward on how we might address this global crisis, and not be accused of simply casting stones at the Government?

The things we pray for, Lord, give us the grace to labour for! <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49366>

## THIS MORNING I PRAY FOR MY ENEMIES

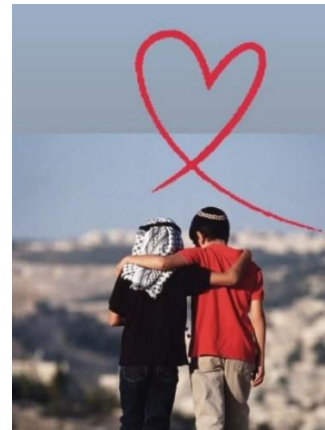
**Heather Kiernan writes:** During Lent one of the Gospel readings was from Matthew 18:21 “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

“This Morning I Pray for My Enemies” by Unites States poet laureate, Joy Harjo is a powerful poem that reveals the razor-thin line that separates who we consider a friend or enemy.

As an indigenous writer and poet, she uncovers a radically alternative means of understanding how we should identify who is an enemy. It doesn't ask us necessarily to forgive, but it does ask that we come from the heart and that we are fierce both in our love and our commitment to what is right.

This poem reminds me of what my old friend, poetry critic Helen Vendler used to say in her lectures, that “poetry is proof that the mind continues to understand what the heart cannot endure.”

THIS MORNING I PRAY FOR MY ENEMIES  
And whom do I call my enemy?  
An enemy must be worthy of engagement.  
I turn in the direction of the sun and keep walking.  
It's the heart that asks the question, not my furious mind.  
The heart is the smaller cousin of the sun.  
It sees and knows everything.  
It hears the gnashing even as it hears the blessing.  
The door to the mind should only open from the heart.  
An enemy who gets in, risks the danger of becoming a friend.  
**Joy Harjo**



## AGONY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

**Martin Newell *London Catholic Worker Issue 75 Lent/Easter:***

As Catholic Workers, we are sure that, in John Lynes' words in our Easter newsletter, 'in a situation of oppression we cannot pretend to be neutral.' The Palestinians are the oppressed people in the Holy Land. We want to respond to the call for active solidarity from Christian Palestinians in particular. But how? Such tragedy and injustice calls for what Catholic Worker co-founder Peter Maurin called 'clarification of thought'.

So, we are sharing articles <sup>1</sup> with diverging views to promote reflection and discussion. We are printing a report on an act of faithful witness at Downing Street which called for 'ceasefire now', the release of hostages, and used red paint hand prints to show that we in the UK also have 'blood on our hands'. We are printing an article about a visit to Palestine which ended on October 6th, the day before the Hamas attack. And we are also printing an article that challenges us about how to express our solidarity in ways that are really helpful.

<sup>1</sup> **NOTE:** [John Lynes' article follows below – to see the other articles mentioned in the paragraph above you can read Issue 75 in full here: <https://www.londoncatholicworker.org/Easter2024.pdf> - **Editor**]

Martin continues: For example, we may agree that the reality in Palestine is an apartheid-like situation, but disagree on whether it is always helpful to say so. We know 'the truth will set us free' (Jesus, in John 8:32 )but also that we are to 'speak the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15 ) and that truth without love can be violence.

We believe that Jesus calls Christians to practice pacifism and active non-violent resistance to injustice and violence. We are called to 'love our enemy' and to pray for their conversion rather than for victory over them. This is almost certainly the hardest practice of the Gospel.

A Catholic Worker approach includes our own complicity alongside calls for repentance from others.

How do we respond to Israel being among the top 10 recipients of UK arms exports, the top recipient of US – mainly military – aid since 1945 and the complicity of the UK in Joe Biden's view that US strategic self-interest dictates unconditional support for Israel? We cannot act from a position of moral superiority, but only from a humble commitment to the good of all, especially those who suffer the most.

**Martin Newell** <https://www.londoncatholicworker.org/Easter2024.pdf> reprinted with permission

## THE TRAGEDY OF THE HOLY LAND

*London Catholic Worker Issue 75 Lent/Easter*

**John Lynes on the continuing trauma and conflict in the Middle East:**

I have the mixed privilege and burden of British citizenship, a Jewish upbringing, and eight years as a human rights observer in Gaza and the West Bank with the Christian Peacemaker Team (now the Community Peacemaker Team) and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme of the World Council of Churches. So I am distraught at the news from the Holy Land. I feel with the Israelis, many themselves children or grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, hemmed in by hostile Arab nations. I feel with Israeli parents watching their teenage children snatched from home and conscripted into an army of occupation, and finding it harder, with each exchange of rockets, to see this as a true expression of their Jewish faith. I feel with Palestinian farmers, robbed of their ancestral lands, watching the pillaging of their olive trees. I feel with the Palestinian children and their teachers I used to watch, bullied at Israeli checkpoints on their way to and from school. I feel with homeless refugees under merciless bombardment in Gaza.

### **The Nakba**

We Brits share responsibility for this prolonged tragedy. When Britain granted freedom to colonies in Africa and South Asia, we left behind, in each case, an elected parliament, a civil administration, and a working framework of law and order. But when Britain ended its Mandate in Palestine in 1948, we played 'God Save the Queen' and sailed away knowing that Arab armies were poised to invade, and that the new State of Israel would fight back. The outcome – the Nakba – was predictable. Jordan occupied the West Bank. Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip. there was no Palestinian State. Thousands of Palestinians became, and remain, refugees.

### **Hamas**

Palestinians' recent factional divisions are at last healed. The ongoing slaughter in Gaza has reunited Palestinians in Gaza, in the West Bank and in their diaspora, in support of Hamas. They respect Hamas as a bastion of Islam, and as the provider of schools, hospitals, universities and social facilities. They contrast Hamas' resistance to Israel with the perceived ineffectiveness of their West-aligned Fatah rivals.

What of those Hamas terrorists? Every oppressed party in the Middle East has a military wing. Jewish parties under the British Mandate were no exception: remember Irgun and the Stern Gang? The armed counterpart of Hamas is the Al-Qassam Brigades. They were responsible for the attack on 7th October 2024. This does not absolve Hamas itself from all responsibility, but does not justify damning them all as terrorists.

The Al-Qassam Brigades were proscribed by the UK in 2001 under the 2000 Terrorism Act. Hamas as a political party was not proscribed until twenty years later. The latter proscription has been pointless and unhelpful. It has obstructed direct negotiations with Hamas, hindering Britain's possible role as a peacemaker.

### **Zionism**

It is easy to misunderstand the relation between Judaism and the State of Israel. The Holocaust was a theological challenge to religious Jews. Jewish festivals – Passover, Hanukah, Purim – typically celebrate God's protection for His Chosen People. In the Holocaust six million Jews were slaughtered just for being Jews. Where was God in Auschwitz?

The creation of the State of Israel seemed to be God's answer – the Promised Land Restored! Many Jews (but not all) sincerely experienced criticism of Israeli politics as an attack on their faith, a rejection of God, and clearly antisemitic.

### **The Language of Blame**

The history of Palestine is a catalogue of appalling mistakes made by Israelis, by Palestinians and – not least – by the UK. That said, in a situation of oppression we cannot pretend to be neutral. But when we rightly speak out for Palestinian rights, we need to recognise that we are up against two traumatised communities. How else to explain why Netanyahu's government believes that bombing Palestinians without mercy will discourage them from supporting Hamas? How else to explain why Al-Qassam launched its attack on unarmed Israeli civilians on 7th October 2024, knowing that Israel would respond against Palestinians with overwhelming force in return?

It is easy to blame this side or that. The language of blame – 'apartheid', 'genocide', 'terrorist', 'boycott' – can only exacerbate the tragedy. The Holy Land cries out for prayer, for empathy, for mutual compassion, for reconciliation. There is no space here to spell out what that means in political terms. I attempted this several years ago in a submission to the UK Foreign Affairs Committee. If you care to read it, it is still on the Government website –

<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/79412/pdf/>

John Lynes <https://www.londoncatholicworker.org/Easter2024.pdf> reprinted with permission

## GAZA: 'FAMINE IS IMMINENT' UN FOOD AGENCY WAR

**Source: Christian Aid** 18 March 2024

The UN food agency says "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza, where an estimated 70% of the population faces catastrophic hunger. William Bell, Christian Aid's Head of Middle East Policy and Advocacy, commented: "Children in Gaza are dying of malnutrition and disease with desperate families reportedly eating grass to survive. This is suffering on a scale you couldn't imagine. Our local partners in Gaza are responding as best they can, under intense pressure, but essential supplies are running perilously low.

How many more lives will be lost to malnutrition, disease and airstrikes before our political leaders see this is the case? To respond at scale, we need unfettered humanitarian access. That means an immediate and permanent ceasefire for which the international community - the UK Government included - must unequivocally demand today."

The World Food Programme released the latest findings of its Integrated Food Security Phase Classification<sup>1</sup>, or IPC, an international process for estimating the scale of hunger crises, on Monday. It says virtually everyone in Gaza is struggling to get enough food, and around 210,000 people in northern Gaza are in Phase 5, the highest, which refers to catastrophic hunger. It also warned that if Israel broadens its offensive to the packed southern city of Rafah, the fighting could drive around half of Gaza's total population of 2.3 million into catastrophic hunger.

<sup>1</sup><https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-strip-ipc-acute-food-insecurity-analysis-15-february-15-july-2024-special-brief>

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49367>

## CELEBRATING SOUTHWARK CARITAS FIRST ANNIVERSARY

**Phil Kerton** 18 March 2024: Archbishop John Wilson presided at a Mass in St George's Cathedral on Saturday, 16 March, to celebrate the first year's work of the diocesan Caritas organisation. He was accompanied by a number of clergy, including three of his auxiliaries (one of them retired) and by Canon Victor Darlington who is the Episcopal Vicar responsible for Caritas Southwark.

The new organisation started out with four broad project themes: Diverting Young People from Crime; Poverty Relief Programmes & Food Bank Support; Care of Older Adults; Migrants and Refugees. More focused initiatives have since developed under these headings, linking and supporting existing projects already in existence and adding new ones,

In his homily, which several felt provided a masterclass in Catholic Social Teaching, Archbishop John made frequent reference to lessons learned during his 2023 visit to El Salvador and his joy in Southwark's hosting of the national shrine to St Oscar Romero. He pointed out that the presence of a Caritas organisation prompts important questions, such as: What kind of vision do we have for the Church in our diocese? What does the Gospel message mean in practice?

We are loved by Christ and want to share his love through words and actions that make it real, and to bring hope. This is our authentic option for the poor, as explained by Romero. "A building is on fire and you're watching it burn, standing and wondering if everyone is safe. Then someone tells you that your mother and your sister are inside that building. Your attitude changes completely. You're frantic; your mother and sister are burning and you'd do anything to rescue them even at the cost of getting charred. That's what it means to be truly committed. If we look at poverty from the outside, as if we're looking at a fire, that's not to opt for the poor, no matter how concerned we may be. We should get inside as if our own mother and sister were burning. Indeed, it's Christ who is there, hungry and suffering."

We are his hands and voice with which to work and advocate for justice. Each has a value as God's creation, made in his image and likeness. As Mother Theresa said when one of her sisters asked how they could possibly feed the huge crowd that had gathered at their door, "We can start by feeding just one of them."

Many can close down arguments by proposing obstacles such as, "There's no room"; "They prefer to live on the street"; "They don't want healthy food". We must use concepts of love and compassion to prompt constructive discussions. God's love overwhelms us and we can embody that love in action, speaking out and advocating for the needy.

We see that modern society often fosters individualism with no consideration for the Common Good. Our mission is to build up a civilisation of love, with families as its building blocks. A diocesan Caritas links many grass-roots actions that are already ongoing, making the links apparent, rather than controlling from the top down.

Successes in one parish or school provide lessons that can be shared with others! We discover that people appreciate being viewed as individuals with their own hopes and joys. Rather than seeing an anonymous mass that appears as a statistic, as a challenge, as a horde that must be penned into joining "one size fits all" solutions; we can try to discern ways to tailor initiatives so that each person is valued and accorded due dignity.

Archbishop John related a tale from El Salvador, when a young woman greeted him with the immediate comment that he had lovely eyes. An unsolicited appreciation that he has continued to enjoy: an action that we can emulate, and see those we support as human persons, not just "clients"!

Mass was followed by refreshments in Amigo Hall and socialising before a series of presentations about a variety of projects from schools and parishes that have come under the Caritas umbrella. These were numerous and came from all corners of the diocese, often with tales of work with other people of Faith and sometimes with serendipitous help from imaginative ideas. Such as realising that Borough Market can be a source of considerable donations of unsold food and that organisations such as Surrey Cricket Club have outreach programmes that can provide various resources to occupy youth clubs - not just cricket equipment! Congratulations were proffered to Canon Victor and to John Coleby, former CEO of Caritas Westminster, who has worked to uncover and link up projects south of the Thames.

Just one comment on an imperfection! Despite the ethical investment policy of the diocese (based upon principles of Catholic Social Teaching, as previously reviewed in ICN), Amigo Hall's supply of much appreciated refreshments and hospitality showed no evidence of concentrating upon fairly traded goods or of using crockery and cutlery that can be recycled. Its CAFOD neighbour on Westminster Bridge Road could certainly provide advice about how to become a Fair Trade and low-waste/low-carbon operation and so encourage visitors to do likewise.

**Caritas Southwark:** <https://rcsouthwark.co.uk/mission/caritas-southwark/>  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49365>

## **PACT APPOINTS HEAD OF FAITH IN ACTION**

**Source: Pact** 20 March 2024

Pact, (the Prison Advice & Care Trust), the national Catholic charity for people affected by imprisonment, has announced that Julia Corcoran has been appointed as Head of Faith in Action.

"Our work is firmly rooted in Catholic social teaching, and we depend on the generosity and goodwill of the Catholic community in our work for the common good" said Andy Keen-Downs, CEO. "We are delighted to welcome Julia to the team."

Julia's previous paid and voluntary roles have been with Operation Noah, Jesuits in Britain, CAFOD, Westminster Diocese Justice and Peace Commission, CYMFed and the Columbans. She said: "I'm thrilled to be joining the Pact team as it's an organisation that responds directly to the Gospel and upholds the dignity and value of every human being. In my new role, I hope to expand the link between the Catholic community and the work of Pact. If you or your parish would like to get involved, please email [faith@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:faith@prisonadvice.org.uk) for more information."

Pact now operates in over 60 prisons across the Catholic Dioceses, and provides a range of national services for prisoners' families, including the Prisoners Families Helpline service, which last year supported 36,000 worried families.

### **About Pact**

Pact is a pioneering national, Catholic charity that supports prisoners, people with convictions, and their children and families. We provide caring and life changing services at every stage of the criminal justice process: in court, in prison, on release, and in the community.

Pact's vision is of a society in which justice is understood as a process of restoration and healing, in which prisons are used sparingly and as places of learning and rehabilitation, and in which the innate dignity and worth of every human being is valued. We work for the common good of society, taking a public health-based approach. We work at the intersection of criminal justice, child and family welfare, mental health, wellbeing provision and health & social care.

Our volunteers and staff can be found in courts, prisons, probation services, and in communities across England & Wales. Building on our Catholic roots, we are a diverse, inclusive, modern, and collaborative charity. We build effective partnerships and sustainable solutions based on our well-established understanding of the systems in which we work, and on our historic values and ethos developed through our 120+ years of service delivery.

**Pact:** [www.prisonadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk)  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49380>

## THE PROBLEM WITH RICHES: A CALL TO CONVERSION

*London Catholic Worker Issue 75 Lent/Easter:*

*Martin Newell on the West's need to repent and renounce its ill-gotten gains*

We have two new priests at our local parish of St John Vianney. Fr Jerome Oduntan and Fr Vincent are members of the Spiritan Religious Order. They are also from Nigeria. Like most Catholic parishes in London, many in the congregation are also from one African country or another.

Africa is the part of the world where the Catholic Church is growing fastest. In terms of explicitly Catholic and Christian faith, Europe is very much in decline. The Catholic Church in England is once more an immigrant church, as it had been ever since the days of the Irish potato famine, made worse as it had been by the British colonial masters. Europe is generally rich, Africa generally poor, in material wealth. It seems God is choosing Africans, and the poor. This should not be surprising.

Living and working among refugees and migrants is a help in understanding these things. So is trying to live the voluntary poverty that Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin talked about. They did not mean destitution. St Francis talked about Lady Poverty. It is a call to conversion away from the comforts and material addictions of our culture.

Voluntary poverty, real simplicity, is blasphemy to a culture of greed. If we take less, there is more for others who need it. If we can cultivate the virtue of needing less we are free to do what is needed and anything is possible, if we put our minds and hearts and backs into it.

In the Catholic Worker movement we seek to share life with, for and among the poor, and to live in, at least a relative, poverty. For God is there. As the estate agent said, there are three things that matter: location, location and location. We locate ourselves among the poor and marginalised, which is all the better to read the Scriptures and hear the voice of the Spirit. The Scriptures were, after all, overwhelmingly written from the margins, from places occupied and oppressed. So such a place should be a good place to read them and understand what God is saying to the Churches. At this time in history, when riches are at least as great a problem as poverty, that certainly includes the Psalmists' refrain, 'In his riches man lacks wisdom, he is like the beasts that are destroyed.' (Psalm 48)

Pope Francis, coming from Argentina, is also bringing us a view of the world from the Global South, from the poor. In this way we can understand his reminders that migrants seeking access to the riches of the world (that have been plundered from the south to the north) must be welcomed as Christ. And that the rich must stop destroying the life of God's Earth that the poor most immediately rely on. As well as his repeated calls for the powerful to stop building and using their armies and building their wealth on the trade in blood that is the arms trade. From the perspective of the poor in the global south this is not controversial. In the words of Pope Francis, as well as the relative life and dynamism of the Church the respective regions, we can discern the perspective from which God sees the world.

It seems obvious that the rich will find it hard to connect with a God who blesses the poor, calls for justice, and critiques riches. A God who calls for simplicity of life to make space for true spiritual experience. It seems obvious that in order for the rich to hang on to Christian faith identity, they – we – might have to distort the Gospel of Jesus. That distorting might be to say that riches and poverty are of no concern. Or, it could be to say that God blesses riches and curses the poor – that is to say, their poverty is their own fault. This is a form of blasphemy, of 'using God's name falsely'.

We live in a culture that increasingly believes it has grown out of a need for God. But no amount of material prosperity and possessions can fill the spiritual void. And so addiction follows. We live in an addictive society: addicted to more things, more experiences, more comfort, more luxury, more profit, more of everything except those that really matter. We talk about 'comfort eating' and can see very clearly the effects of obesity. But with buying things we hide the truth by calling it (with a touch of irony, admittedly) 'retail therapy', when 'comfort shopping' would be more accurate. We cannot see the effects of comfort shopping as easily as comfort eating, but it has similar life-denying, self-harming effects on our spiritual selves, on the planet and on others. In fact, it is worse because there is a limit to how much we can eat.

We talk about people suffering from addiction, but we live in a culture of addiction, promoted all the time by saturation-advertising in the name of profit. It is only the most extreme addictions that stand out. In a culture of addiction to hedonism, where this is lauded and celebrated, even the poor become hedonists. And all this is promoted by capitalism with its addiction to profit and 'growth'.

No wonder God is choosing the poorest, even if sometimes we – I – find it difficult to understand.

We are like the rich man tearing down his barns to build bigger ones in which to store his hoarded wealth while the poor starve (Luke 12:16- 21). People in this country nowadays 'need' bigger houses because they 'need' the space to keep all their stuff. And the corporations are continually tearing down their barns – their towers in central London and elsewhere – to build taller ones, all the better to accumulate more riches while the poor still starve. Very soon, the demand will be made for our souls.

Please God, the climate and environmental emergency will be a reality check that will bring us back to our senses. Please God, we will hear this call to conversion. Please God, we will hear the cry of the poor, the planet, and of peace, and begin to realise what it means to live simply and embrace Lady Poverty, so that all people and all creation may live life to the full.

**Martin Newell** <https://www.londoncatholicworker.org/Easter2024.pdf> reprinted with permission

## A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

*After pastoring for over twenty years at a large city church, and fulfilling a range of senior leadership positions, **Karen Reed** took the risk twelve years ago to live as an urban worker, joining with what God is doing in East Vancouver, one of the most unchurched neighbourhoods in Canada. She lives an intentionally shared life in a hundred-year-old, six-bedroom house, as a base to seek the flourishing of her community. Karen writes here about her deliberate choice to reorder her life, to move out of pastoral ministry and become centred in her neighbourhood. She shares how this grew into a discovery about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in fraternity with her neighbours:*

Neighbours. You know, those people who live around us in our specific neighbourhood, that we didn't choose and may not like or even know their names. How are we to think about neighbours? Could it be that neighbourliness is the most important value for us to hold and live out?

Several years ago I began a process of reorienting my entire way of life within the proximity of the neighbourhood, out of a longing for a more integrated way of living and a deeper experience of connection and community. I began deceptively simple practices – that I now think have the potential to be staggering in their scope in helping us and others live well. My imagination was sparked for another way of living and being.

For most of my life, I lived on adrenaline and deadlines. Neighbours were marginalized with my busy life, but the few I knew usually received friendly and quick hellos as I was coming or going in car. A culture built on speed and scale tends to neglect relationships – especially those deemed optional, which is the way neighbours are often viewed. Then I moved to East Vancouver, and without realizing it, I slowly began to shift lifestyle practices. I sold my car and began to use transit or my bike. I built a food garden and sought gardening tips from my Italian neighbours. I eventually started getting to know neighbours by name, and began inviting a few in for a drink or a meal. I learned how to borrow things from neighbours (especially tools), instead of insisting on having my own, which affirms our inter-dependence.

Our lives have become so fragmented and privatized and independent – which has set a course for isolation and alienation – that we have learned to function in our daily life without knowing even one neighbour's name. I'm learning that the simple, ordinary practices that enable a community to flourish tend to be diminished in value when we don't depend on each other practically. Productivity and dehumanizing efficiency dominate our lives. It takes time to get to the place where you know your neighbours and can experience connection and a sense of belonging in a neighbourhood.

I continue to be stunned at how simple acts can be so meaningful to people, especially if they are feeling isolated (and Vancouver Foundation research <sup>1</sup> has revealed that one in four people in our city is isolated). Small gestures that remind people they are seen and thought about and known can help us all feel not so alone. The second year I was here, I began hosting regular soup nights, inviting my immediate neighbours to drop in for a simple meal of homemade soup. We eventually averaged about 35 – 45 people, with almost every decade represented. Most people tend to gather with their 'tribes,' so my neighbours loved it. A few times I was greeted at the door by someone saying they came because they wanted to meet the woman who invited strangers into her home! How did we allow that to become such a strange practice?

The majority of my neighbours have lived here for ten, twenty or thirty-plus years, yet most only knew a few other neighbours by name. I was the newbie, and yet I found myself introducing neighbours to each other. Now, the majority have exchanged emails and many even have shared their house keys. After we together weaved a bit of social fabric as a neighbourhood, we put our hand collectively to sponsor a refugee family, raising \$50K as a neighbourhood, welcoming a family who moved in across the street. Working together fast-tracks relationship building as we work through diverse opinions and personalities.



You sacrifice when you are committed to something larger than yourself and to what can only be done together. How can we push against valuing the private over the common? Getting up close with people doesn't create problems as much as it reveals issues (think of iron sharpening iron – sparks fly!). We don't develop our character in isolation, but rather it grows in the context of our relationships, in the tensions and resolutions.

Author and theologian James Houston highlights that there is no such thing as personal maturity, but only 'social maturity'. I mature at the pace of the community of people around me – as we work out and grow through conflict, stress, acceptance, forgiveness, our differences and struggles. We do need each other to grow our awareness of ourselves and to mature, especially those not like us. These relational dynamics contribute to helping us all become more fully human and alive.

Neighbourhood gatherings allow people to meet others from outside their 'tribes.'

Sociologists have been sounding the alarm regarding our plummeting social capital; the absence of it is impoverishing our lives and communities. It is what builds civil society, which contributes to a stronger democracy.

There is a growing understanding about the richness of life that has been lost within our fragmented and isolated lives, and attention is now being given to restore the historic nature of neighbourhoods. The close proximity and frequency to run into neighbours is what builds social capital – that relational fabric in a community. Could it be that this social connectedness contributes to a person's sense of wellbeing more than we have understood and, shockingly, that our own maturity and personal thriving is connected to our neighbourliness. Maybe this is why Jesus Christ declared loving neighbour as primary.

Our deepest principles and maturity are reflected to those who may or may not be friends, but are within our realm to include, notice and care for.

When we take an interest in our neighbours, we begin to encompass universal ethics: you won't steal from or slander them, or feel superior to them, but reflect truth-telling, kindness and empathy, patience and forgiveness. It's a movement away from prejudice, which shrinks not only our hearts but also our humanity and ultimately our society. It's far easier to care for those you love, but more revealing of our morality is our relationship with the neighbour, who is easily ignored.

These common ethics and practices enable us to belong to one another across all kinds of divides. If we disregard, despise, neglect those in closest proximity to us, we may contribute to their isolation and maybe even our own. Our common deep need for goodness gets practised and honed in the neighbourhood, in relationship with others, not just in the private. And what is embodied in our neighbourhoods is what becomes our society.

Our culture often feeds the delusion that we can live autonomously and self-sufficiently. We cannot. It's a lie that has diminished us. We need each other, and neighbourliness helps us practice that reality. In this process, both we and our neighbours may find ourselves flourishing and discovering what it means to live well by loving well.

**Karen Reed**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/detail/connect-engage-2017-report/>

• Karen Reed lives in East Vancouver, Canada. This story is featured in the Lent 2024 edition of the T4CG Newsletter and was published with kind permission of *Church for Vancouver*. <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/>

## LAUDATO SI' WEEK – SEEDS OF HOPE 19-26 May 2024

This Laudato Si' Week and Pentecost, let us gather in community to contemplate and nurture seeds of hope for our "suffering planet" (LD 2). *Laudate Deum* is a reminder about the urgency of the Laudato Si' message and the need for both personal and cultural transformation amidst our ecological and climate crises.

*"There are no lasting changes without cultural changes  
... and there are no cultural changes without personal changes" (LD, 70)*

This year's Laudato Si' Week theme is inspired by the symbol for Season of Creation 2024, "firstfruits." Let us be seeds of hope in our lives and our world, rooted in faith and love. <https://laudatosiweek.org/>

## COLUMBAN 'BIODIVERSITY MATTERS' COMPETITION WINNERS

**Ellen Teague and Sarah MacDonald** 20 March 2024

Winners have been announced in a media competition for young people on the subject 'Biodiversity Matters,' run by the Columban Missionary Society in Britain and Ireland. The announcement day – 21 March – is the UN's International Day of Forests. Young people 13-18 years were asked to produce a piece of writing or image that demonstrates an awareness and understanding of the issue of biodiversity and highlight people, communities and/or organisations trying to build a sustainable future. Protecting biodiversity – which humanity relies on for health, food and well-being - is a mission priority of Columban missionaries. The competition attracted 223 entries across Britain and Ireland.

In Britain, entries from 29 schools were judged by media experts who praised the high quality of all the entries shortlisted: Ruth Gledhill (Assistant Editor at The Tablet), Josephine Siedlecka (Founder and Editor of Independent Catholic News – ICN), Jao Resari (Columban lay missionary in Taiwan and an artist), and James Trewby (Columban Education Worker). Mary Colwell, author and champion for curlew recovery and nature education provided expertise on the theme. "We were very happy with the quality of entries and I was amazed at their energy and thoughtfulness," said James Trewby, Columban Education Worker in Britain.

In Britain, the winning article came from Austin Beenham of Holy Cross Catholic High School in Chorley, Lancashire. It was described by Ruth Gledhill of The Tablet as "an outstanding piece which incorporates calls to action, strong arguments and personal experience along with knowledge and accurate citation of Catholic Social Thought." Austin himself said, "I am very thankful that I have been able to raise awareness on the biodiversity crisis and hopefully made a difference." Second and third were Anna Cookson of Notre Dame Sixth Form College in Leeds and Sarah Ashcroft of Loreto Grammer School in Altrincham. Becki Bradbury of the RE Department at Loreto, one of many RE teachers who promoted the competition, said, "we feel that the competition has allowed our students to fully consider the issue of biodiversity within our world and engage with Pope Francis' Laudato Si' letter which serves as a reminder to all of us how important care for our common home is."

With her winning image, 'Love of the World', Chidera Anyakora, also from the Loreto School in Altrincham, said, "In this piece I wanted to present a diverse range of wildlife that mirrors the diverse and unique nature of our world as biodiversity can come in different forms." Judge Mary Colwell said: "I really liked the imaginative approach and the message. By using the image of a heart wrapped in nature, it made the point that saving the natural world is as much about the heart as about rational thinking and science. That is the message of Laudato Si, too. And I like the variety of creatures used." Second and third image winners were Megan-Rose Ibus of Loreto College in St Albans and Charlotte Moyes of St Edward's in Poole. Charlotte said that in her hourglass drawing, "I wanted to show how time was ticking and that we urgently need to make a change and raise awareness about the impact we are having on biodiversity and that we should all play our part to protect our planet for future generations."



In Ireland, judges included William Scholes (Assistant Editor of the Irish News), Patsy McGarry (Irish Times), Jane Mellett (Church Outreach Manager with Trócaire), Fr Jason Antiquera (Columban missionary-artist from the Philippines), and Fr Sean McDonagh (Columban priest, ecologist and author, who has long campaigned for the protection of Biodiversity).

In Ireland, the text winners were Clíodhna McKeever of St Catherine's College, Armagh who secured first place; Conn Fyfe of St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena who came second; and Anna McQuillan of St Dominic's, Belfast who came third. Image winners were Alanah McKenzie of St Paul's Secondary School, Dublin who was awarded first prize; Keelin Bellemand of Le Cheile Secondary School, Tyrrelstown, Dublin who came second; and Róise Curtin of Loreto Secondary School Clonmel who came third.

Speaking about the winning images, Columban artist, Fr Jason Antiquera paid tribute to, "the richness of images and the depth of colours in the striking artwork". He added: "My message to all, both to the participants and the winners, is to persevere in their art because it is needed. Even when sometimes it is rejected or does not have audience - it has worth and it still has an impact - the future belongs to artists like them." Jane Mellett of Trócaire, an expert on Laudato Si' and biodiversity, said she was "so impressed with all of the finalists" and described the competition as "a great initiative".

The Columbans thanked all the young people who entered the 2024 competition and the judging panel. Former Columban competitions have focused on Climate Change, Migration, Throwaway Culture, Racism, 21st Century Changemakers and Peace.

**Full list of winners and judges at:** [www.columbancompetition.com/](http://www.columbancompetition.com/)  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49386>

## WORLD CURLEW DAY 21 APRIL

World Curlew Day is held on 21 April every year and is a grass-roots initiative which champions curlews worldwide. Created by Mary Colwell in 2017, the day shines a light on the dangers curlews face as a result of shifting factors both globally and locally. Many of these are factors deeply linked to human activity, such as land-use and climate change: we must take responsibility for protecting these wonderful birds. <https://www.curlewaction.org/world-curlew-day/>

### WHY 21 APRIL?

St Beuno is the patron saint of curlews, the charming story of how and why he blessed the curlew can be found on our 'Curlews and Culture' page: <https://www.curlewaction.org/about-curlews/#curlews-in-culture> St Beuno's feast day is 21 April! It is also the day that our founder, Mary Colwell, began her 500 mile walk for curlews in 2016 – read her book *Curlew Moon* to hear all about it.

### HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

There are plenty of ways to help raise awareness for the curlew, including hosting an event, creating flyers to distribute locally, or even making a sign warning walkers to keep dogs on leads around curlew nests. If you want to fundraise for us, you could take part in a sponsored walk or run, or perhaps organise a gala evening with fun fundraising activities and a curlew theme. As always, we will be organising lots of activities for World Curlew Day (including our famous art and poetry competition), so keep an eye out for more news throughout our website, social media, emails and newsletters.

To find out more, visit our **Support Us** page: <https://www.curlewaction.org/support-us/>

### NATURAL HISTORY EDUCATION

Mary Colwell has spearheaded the campaign for a GCSE in Natural History since 2011, which has now been confirmed by the department of education! The Green Party MP Caroline Lucas, and Tim Oates from the exam board OCR have been wonderful collaborators in pushing this through the right channels and getting us to this point. Everyone at Curlew Action would like to thank them for their support. Creating a nature-literate society that loves, understands and supports the wildlife of the UK is at the heart of what Curlew Action is about. Next campaign: Natural History A-Level!

**Mary Colwell writes** 14/09/2023: It has been a while since we had an update on the progress of the GCSE in Natural History, so this is where we are. The Department for Education announced the new GCSE as part of their Climate Change and Sustainability programme <sup>1</sup>, in April 2022. This initiative sets out a range of measures for schools and young people to help foster greater awareness about the environmental crises we face.

It was quite a launch with speeches made to a large audience beneath the skeleton of a Blue Whale in the main hall of the Natural History Museum in London. Immediately, the Department appointed a panel to establish what is called the 'subject criteria' for the qualification, with subject criteria defined as: GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which awarding organisations create the detail of their specifications, so ensuring progression from key stage 3 national curriculum requirements and the possibilities for progression to A level.

Think of subject criteria as the overarching principles for the GCSE, and they are vital. If the master framework is not right the syllabuses that will be set by the various exam boards will not be right either, as all the exam boards are different. The criteria have now been written by the secret panel (the whole process is secret) and are now submitted and sitting with the Schools Minister who has had them for many months but they have not yet been signed off, there are obviously queries to be answered and there is no time scale given when this will happen. What is certain is that this delay will mean first teaching will now be in 2026, not 2025, as there is so much to do to get schools ready.

It is a complicated business launching a new GCSE, and we know from surveys and communication with schools that there is some concern that teachers feel underconfident about teaching it. Many feel they don't have the skills, they are worried about resources and are unsure about access to experts and even to wildlife itself. Some of that is answered in the Department of Education's proposal to create Nature Parks <sup>2</sup>, using school grounds as nature reserves for study. This is an excellent initiative, but wildlife areas need skilled people to keep them going.

Curlew Action sees the need for local, bespoke teacher and pupil training through what we are calling Nature Hubs. A Nature Hub is a place to go to learn about being a naturalist. It will offer training in identification skills, fieldwork, field safety, local ecology, and local natural history. Nature Hubs will, ideally, be all over the country, connecting need with expertise. It is a big and bold idea, and we need blended finance to work, but we are working hard to secure it. We are putting time and effort into this as we know nature needs us to act fast.

So – watch this space for updates and more information as the GCSE in Natural History grinds through the system and as we make Nature Hubs a reality, getting schools, teachers, and pupils ready for a much more nature aware future. All this, of course, fitting in with the Department for Education’s own plans, which will start to unfold in the near future. Exciting times ahead.

<https://www.curlewaction.org/an-update-on-the-natural-history-gcse/>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nbn.org.uk/news/national-education-nature-park/>

#### **More on natural history and education:**

Embedding Natural History into our own, and our children’s, education

<https://www.curlewaction.org/embedding-natural-history-into-our-own-and-our-childrens-education/>

Creating future naturalists: why is Natural History education so important?

<https://www.curlewaction.org/the-junior-curlew-network-engaging-young-people-with-curlew-conservation/>

#### **IRISH BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE: RETURN 30% OF CHURCH GROUNDS TO NATURE BY 2030**

**Background to this initiative:** In March 2023, the Irish Bishops’ Conference agreed that parishes would return 30% of church grounds to nature by 2030. This is a response to the biodiversity crisis our world is facing, the call of *Laudato Si’* and the agreements made at the recent UN Conference on Biodiversity (COP15). All are called to arrest the decline of biodiversity for the sake of the next generation.

“Parishes are asked to expand their circles of solidarity, to protect and care for biodiversity and creation on 30% of their grounds, and to care for this as a haven for pollinators and biodiversity, that can be enjoyed by the whole community.”  
– Irish Bishops’ Conference Spring Statement 2023.

In *Laudato Si’* we read that this diversity of species has an “intrinsic value independent of their usefulness. Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself” (LS 140). We are called to care for the earth and its creatures, “to till and to keep the garden of the Lord” (*Genesis 2:15*). We hope that the resources below will help parishes to respond to the cry of the earth.

**See more here:** <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/laudato-si/returning-to-nature/>

#### **PEACE EDUCATION NETWORK TEACH PEACE RESOURCES**

The Peace Education Network shares teaching materials via <https://www.tes.com/>

**TEACH PEACE SECONDARY** offers over 50 cross-curricular lessons from a range of organisations including Pax Christi, Amnesty International, Values Based Education, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Facing History & Ourselves, Corrymeela, and War Child. Topics include challenging antisemitism and Islamophobia, conflict transformation, religion and peace, the human rights effects of the arms trade, how to nurture inner peace and lots, lots more.

This resource has been supported by the following members of the Peace Education Network, and partner organisations: Afghanistan Peace Project, Amnesty International UK, Child’s Rights International Network (CRIN), CMC Civil Mediation Council, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) Peace Education, Circles of Salam, Corrymeela, Coventry Cathedral, CRESST, Development Education Centre South Yorkshire, Diversity Role Models, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) UK and Ireland, Equality Trust, Facing History and Ourselves UK, Greenham Women Everywhere, Inscape Animations, Journey to Justice, Legacy of War Foundation, London Mining Network, Oxfam GB, Pax Christi UK, Peace Jam UK, Peace Pathways, Peace Pledge Union, Peacemakers, Protection Approaches, Quakers in Britain, Regions for Peace UK, filmmaker Sema Basharan, SGR Scientists for Global Responsibility, St Ethelburga’s, The Forgiveness Project, VbE (Values-based Education), War Child, WCIA Welsh Centre for International Affairs, WILPF Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, World Beyond War.

**Pax Christi England and Wales** were thrilled to contribute a lesson exploring military spending. You can find the brochure at [www.peace-education.org.uk/teach-peace](http://www.peace-education.org.uk/teach-peace) and the link to the TES page with the lessons is <https://bit.ly/teach-peace-tes>

We offer talks and interactive workshops for children and young people in schools, parishes, and at a range of youth events. Our talks and workshops encourage critical reflection on issues of peace and nonviolence, as well as the role of peacemaking as part of the Christian life. For more information visit our website at <https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-education/> or contact Aisling at [education@paxchristi.org.uk](mailto:education@paxchristi.org.uk)

## 2024 UK GENERAL ELECTION: USING OUR CATHOLIC VOICE

Ahead of the general election, CAFOD will be launching a new initiative called A Year of Encounter. This is an SVP and CAFOD joint initiative aiming to mobilise parishes to reach out to candidates and draw attention to some of the issues that matter to us as Catholics. This initiative is based on three activities: asking parishioners to email their candidates; attending hustings and being ready to ask key questions if candidates knock on parishioners' doors.

In order to support parishes as much as possible to participate in this initiative, we are putting together joint resources and we will be running face to face training opportunities (on 25th and 27 April). This sits really with the subject of this year's NJPN conference **JUST POLITICS**.

See more at: <https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/campaign-with-us/year-of-encounter>

Kind regards, Andrea Speranza | Campaigns Engagement Manager

E: [asperanza@cafod.org.uk](mailto:asperanza@cafod.org.uk) | W: [cafod.org.uk](http://cafod.org.uk)

As Christians we have a long tradition of being actively involved in the big issues of our time. From Catherine of Siena to Oscar Romero, the lives of many saints show us that the greater their devotion to the Lord, the deeper their commitment to addressing the social problems of their time. As people of faith, the forthcoming general election is an opportunity to draw attention to the key issues that matter to us.

### A Year of Encounter

CAFOD and SVP are coming together to equip parishes with training and resources to contact candidates on the issues we care about. The greater the number of parishes contacting local candidates, the stronger the Catholic voice will be in your area. Let's not miss this opportunity to put our faith into practice.

<https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/campaign-with-us/year-of-encounter>

## BOARBANK HALL PROGRAMME FOR 2024

### 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)

## ANNUAL CLERGY JUSTICE & PEACE GATHERING

For more than 25 years an informal group of Catholic clergy whose ministry involves them in Justice & Peace issues has met at Wistaston Hall, Crewe, to reflect on how our faith can illuminate our understanding of the contemporary world and how our communities can be a sign of hope in our society. This year, the meeting is from 6pm on Sunday, May 5 to breakfast time on Tuesday, May 7.

If you would be interested contact: [johnlally.shiloh@outlook.com](mailto:johnlally.shiloh@outlook.com) or [rob.esdaile@abdiocese.org.uk](mailto:rob.esdaile@abdiocese.org.uk)

LINK: Wistaston Hall: [www.orc-crewe.org/](http://www.orc-crewe.org/)

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49364>

## LENT AND EASTER REFLECTIONS

**Anne O'Connor writes:** *Much of material that I've used this year for services of prayer and reflection and personal prayer time is from artist, writer and retreat leader Jan Richardson <https://www.janrichardson.com/>*

**Jan writes:** Several years ago, I did a series of charcoal drawings for Peter Storey's book *Listening at Golgotha*, in which he reflects on Jesus' Seven Last Words from the cross. Peter is a retired bishop and active leader of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and his experiences of working for justice and reconciliation in his home country profoundly shape his understanding of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

In Peter's reflection on Jesus' third word, "Woman, here is your son.... Here is your mother," he observes that in giving his mother and his beloved friend John to one another, Jesus "created a community that was to become family to the widow, the orphan, the outcast, and the stranger."

Peter writes of our call to such a community as a "sacred trust," and he asks, "If we accept, can anybody suffer hunger, homelessness, or need? Would there be any lonely old people? Could there be a single unwanted child? If Jesus has made everyone kin to me, would that not make every war in history a civil war and every casualty a death in my family?"

We call the crucifixion of Jesus the passion, and so it is, for us as well as for him. Each time we stretch out our arms in love to one another, every time we open our hearts, we find the shadow of the cross, but also a glimpse of the open tomb.

Jesus' final word from the cross, "Into your hands I commend my spirit," reminds us that every relationship will, at some point, contain a good-bye.

Yet we who know the rest of the story, we who have glimpsed the other side of Good Friday, know that Jesus' last word from the cross is not the final word. There are more words to come, crucial words that Christ will yet add to our vocabulary, our story, our community.

For now, we wait.

Together.

**Jan Richardson** from *The Painted Prayerbook*  
<https://paintedprayerbook.com/>

### REFLECTION FOR GOOD FRIDAY

Years earlier, when an angel appeared in a sheep pasture proclaiming good news of great joy, the angel told the shepherds of a Saviour, a Messiah, a Lord whom they would find as a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Now, on this day, the Saviour is wrapped in a spiced shroud of linen cloths, a scented winding sheet to hold him as he lies in the tomb.

Though joy must have prevailed at the beginning of his life and fear and grief at the end, surely, among those who saw and knew him best, celebration and sorrow were mixed on each occasion.

Yet as at the beginning, so at the end: those who love Christ enfold him, tend him, bless him.

**Jan Richardson** from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*

### WHAT ABIDES (FOR GOOD FRIDAY)

You will know  
this blessing  
by how it  
does not stay still,  
by the way it  
refuses to rest  
in one place.

You will recognize it  
by how it takes  
first one form,  
then another:

now running down  
the face of the mother  
who watches the breaking  
of the child  
she had borne;

now in the stance  
of the woman  
who followed him here  
and will not leave him  
bereft.

Now it twists in anguish  
on the mouth of the friend  
whom he loved;

now it bares itself  
in the wound,  
the cry,  
the finishing and  
final breath.

This blessing  
is not in any one  
of these alone.

It is what  
binds them  
together.

It is what dwells  
in the space  
between them,  
though it be torn  
and gaping.

It is what abides  
in the tear  
the rending makes.

**Jan Richardson**  
from *Circle of Grace: A Book of  
Blessings for the Seasons*

To be guests at the table of the one who washes our feet and disappears into bread and wine is surely to be guests on this earth of a God who calls us into the real story he is creating. We shall only know this in a real way if we learn to tread lightly on the earth and realize our communion with the dispossessed.

**Fr Tom Cullinan**

### **THE CROSS IS A SIGN OF LOVE**

**From Isaiah, chapter 53:**

What remains now before our eyes? It is a crucified man, a cross raised on Golgotha, a cross which seems a sign of the final defeat of the One who brought light to those immersed in darkness, the One who spoke of the power of forgiveness and of mercy, the One who asked us to believe in God's infinite love for each human person.

**Pope Benedict XVI reflects:**

Let us look more closely at that man crucified between earth and heaven. Let us contemplate him more intently, and we will realize that the cross is not the banner of the victory of death, sin and evil, but rather the luminous sign of love, of God's immense love, of something that we could never have asked, imagined or expected: God bent down over us, he lowered himself, even to the darkest corner of our lives, in order to stretch out his hand and draw us to himself, to bring us all the way to himself.

The cross speaks to us of the supreme love of God and invites, today, to renew our faith in the power of that love, and to believe that in every situation of our lives, our history and our world, God is able to vanquish death, sin and evil, and to give us new, risen life. In the Son of God's death on the cross, we find the seed of new hope for life, like the seed which dies within the earth.

### **SURRENDERING TO GOD'S LOVE**

To return to God means to return to God with all that I am and all that I have. I cannot return to God with just half of my being. It is going to be a very long road. Every time I pray, I feel the struggle. It is the struggle of letting God be the God of my whole being. It is the struggle to trust that true freedom lies hidden in total surrender to God's love.

Following Jesus is the way to enter into the struggle and find true freedom. The way is the way of the cross, and true freedom is the freedom found in the victory over death. Jesus' total obedience to his Father led him to the cross, and through the cross to a life no longer subject to the competitive games of this world. Jesus held on to nothing; there was nothing left for him to cling to. Only when I surrender myself completely to God's love can I expect to be free from endless distractions, ready to hear the voice of love, and able to recognize my own unique call.

**Henri Nouwen**

### **PRAYER FOR PEACE IN THE HOLY LAND**

God of mercy,  
we lay before you the hearts, minds and bodies  
of all those suffering from violence  
in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel.  
Shower upon all the people of this holy land  
the spirit of justice and reconciliation.  
And so we pray: Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.

In you, Lord, all life is connected  
and all the Earth and its land are to be cherished, not controlled.  
Your gifts are for all.  
Yet as we see the violence and hatred in the land called Holy,  
and see the signs of climate breakdown,  
help us all to work to live in communion.  
And so we pray: Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.

As people of many religions remind us:  
All humanity is connected, no one is really free until all are free.  
Help us to pray for all in Israel and all in the Palestinian territories.  
We pray for those who live in fear of the other;  
For all who consider violence to be the way forward.  
We pray for all who by acting in hate dehumanise themselves.  
And so we pray: Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.

**Iona Community** <https://iona.org.uk/prayers-for-israel-palestine/>

## DIARY

### APRIL

**11 Merseyside Pax Christi Meeting** 2pm St Michael's Parish Centre, Horne St Liverpool L6 5EH contact Jan Harper 07591082195 email [janharper20211@outlook.com](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)

**21 World Curlew Day** <https://www.curlewaction.org/world-curlew-day/> (see page 11)

**22 Earth Day Planet vs. Plastics** <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2024/>

### MAY

**9 Merseyside Pax Christi Meeting** 2pm (see April 11 for details)

**12-18 Christian Aid week** <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week?>

**13-18 Boarbank Hall Week of prayer, walks and birdwatching with a focus on learning birdsong.** Contact Sr Margaret Atkins on [margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk](mailto:margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk) or 015395-32288

**15 International Conscientious Objectors' Day** <https://nationaltoday.com/international-conscientious-objectors-day/>

**19-26 Laudato Si' Week** <https://laudatosiweek.org/>

**21 Feast of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter** Pax Christi's updated pack with biographical information and ready to use service and reflections £6 available from <https://paxchristi.org.uk/product-category/bl-franz-jagerstatter/>

**25 May-1 June Boarbank Hall Living Laudato Si' Residential week.** Explore how to live out Laudato Si' fully in our personal lives and within the Church. All welcome. Contact Sr Margaret Atkins (see May 13-18 for contact info)

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

**24 Catholic Association for Racial Justice - 40th Anniversary Year.** Amigo Hall – St Georges Cathedral, Southwark. Speakers on Travellers, Caste discrimination, Migrants and Citizens of colour, Black Vocations, 'Love the Stranger' (CBCEW) and a discussion of the Racial Justice Agenda for Change. Ends with Mass in Southwark Cathedral. <https://www.carj.org.uk/>

### JUNE

**1 Pax Christi England and Wales Annual General Meeting,** Friends Meeting House, 22, School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BT. For details see [www.paxchristi.org.uk](http://www.paxchristi.org.uk) 020 8203 4884

**13 Merseyside Pax Christi Meeting** (see April 11 for details)

**29 Merseyside Pax Christi Retreat** at The Irenaeus Project, Great Georges Rd, Liverpool L22 1RD contact Jan Harper 07591082195 email [janharper20211@outlook.com](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)

### JULY

**NJPN 46th Annual conference on July 19th –21st at the Hayes Centre, Swanwick JUST POLITICS.** Building on the work of the past two years' conferences this conference will seek to explore the need for truth and integrity in the public place. More details and booking form to download: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/>

**NB** Bookings made after Wednesday May 15th incur a booking surcharge.

**NJPN are STILL looking for a new 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)

**COULD YOU JOIN THE LIVERPOOL J & P COMMISSION?** Jennie Rowlands writes: We are still recruiting new members for the Justice and Peace Commission. This is an exciting time to join the Commission as we look to renew our way of working, centred around the see-judge-act model. We are looking for members to bring fresh perspectives and energy to our work. If you are interested, please contact [j.rowlands@rcaol.org.uk](mailto:j.rowlands@rcaol.org.uk)

● **THE LATEST NJPN E BULLETIN FOCUSES ON GAZA:** Download here: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-ebulletins/njpn-e-bulletin-on-gaza/>

● **Sign up** for regular news and information from NJPN (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) 020 7901 4864

● **Read the SPRING issue of MOUTHPEACE** the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses <https://jpschrewsbury.files.wordpress.com/2024/02/mouthpeace-spring-2024.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*