

NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin January 2026

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 articles and diary dates to: anneoc980@hotmail.com

CHRISTMAS REFLECTION – FROM A REFUGEE, TO THE COUNTRY I NOW CALL HOME

This Christmas, I'm writing as myself. Not as a headline. Not as a statistic. But as a person who became displaced in 2022, when my life in Ukraine split into before and after.

I didn't come to Wales chasing something better. I came because safety for my children disappeared overnight. Because war does that - it shrinks your world down to one question: how do we survive?

That's why the Christmas story doesn't feel distant to me. It feels painfully close.

We like to soften it - the carols, the candles, the calm. But Christmas is not a comfortable story. It is a refugee story.

A young family displaced by politics they did not control. No room. No certainty. Violence close enough to force them to run for their child's life. A dangerous journey into a foreign land, relying entirely on the kindness of strangers. Mary. Joseph. Jesus. They survived because someone opened a door. Without that welcome, there would be no Christmas.

And yet today when more than 110 million people around the world are forcibly displaced, refugees are increasingly spoken about as problems, threats, costs.

Even here in Wales, I feel the atmosphere changing. I hear it in conversations. I see it online. Far-right narratives are growing louder, and compassion is slowly being pushed aside by fear and hate.

That scares me, not only as a refugee, but as a human being. Because Jesus never divided people by nationality. He never asked where someone was from before he healed them. He crossed borders - cultural, social, religious - constantly. He welcomed the people others avoided. The refugee child grew into a man whose entire life was about radical welcome.

Christmas is not just about generosity. It is about incarnation, God choosing not to stay distant. Not offering sympathy from afar. But becoming human. Becoming vulnerable. Becoming with us. And for me, this is where faith becomes real.

Being Christian today, truly, is not about politely tolerating injustice. It is not about feeling sad while harmful systems remain untouched. It is not about staying neutral when people's dignity is stripped away.

To me, being Christian means not accepting injustice as normal. It means caring and acting. Standing alongside people who are silenced. Fighting, gently but firmly, for a more just world.

Because praying for people is easier than standing with them. Good intentions are easier than hard conversations. But Jesus never chose the easy road.

And systems matter.

In the UK today, asylum seekers are not allowed to work for the first 12 months of their claim, even if they desperately want to. Even after that, they are restricted to a narrow list of jobs that often ignores their real skills. Doctors. Nurses. Teachers. Journalists. Engineers. People ready to contribute, forced into waiting and dependency. This helps no one.

In Wales, we struggle to staff the NHS, care homes, rural communities. The people so often described as a "burden" are very often the people who could strengthen our society, if we allowed them to belong.

I have seen another reality. I have felt safety return because a stranger smiled at me. I have seen community built through small acts, invitations, help with buses, shared meals, patient conversations.

This Christmas, I am asking for memory and courage.

Remember that Jesus was a refugee. Remember that Christmas only exists because people chose welcome over fear and hate. Remember that faith without justice is empty.

And looking ahead to 2026, this is the Wales I want to believe in. A Wales that chooses dignity over division. A Wales that refuses fear and hate as an identity. This is the country I believe in.

And as I hold hope for this place that gave my kids safety, I also hold hope, fiercely, for my home country, Ukraine.

For peace. For return. For healing.

May this Christmas remind us that love is not abstract. Hope is not passive. And welcome, real welcome, can change the course of a life.

This photo is from my life in Ukraine before the war, me and my son, in the snow, in an ordinary moment of happiness.

I'm sharing it to remind you that refugees don't begin with loss. We begin with homes, love, routines, laughter, and moments like this. Before displacement, before labels, before being turned into a headline, this is who we were, and who we still are.

Yuliia



Editor's note: I asked Yuliia for some background information about herself. This is what she wrote:

My name is Yuliia. My hometown in eastern Ukraine, six kilometers from the largest nuclear power plant in Europe, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. It was occupied during the second week of the full-scale invasion in 2022. After four attempts, I was finally able to leave.

Today, I live in Wales with my two children. I am profoundly grateful for the safety we have found here, and for the warmth, generosity, and dignity with which we have been welcomed.

But I want people to understand what the reality of being a refugee truly means.

It is not only about escaping danger or crossing a border. It is about leaving your home without knowing if you will ever see it again. It is about carrying fear in your body long after you are safe. It is about answering your children's questions when you have no answers yourself. It is about rebuilding a life while your heart remains in a place that no longer exists as it once did.

Refugee life is gratitude intertwined with grief, relief shadowed by guilt, and the constant effort to stay strong for those who depend on you while you are still learning how to stand again.

BLESSING

Now
more than ever
let us be the ones
who will not turn away.
Let us be the ones
who will go
farther into the wreck
and deeper into the rubble.

Let us be the ones
who will enter into the places
of devastation beyond belief
and despair beyond our imagining

And there let us listen
for the Spirit that brooded
over the formless darkness,
and there let us look again
for the God who gathered up the chaos
and began to create.

Let us be the ones
who will give ourselves
to the work of making again
and to the endless beginning
of creation.

© Jan Richardson from *Walking the Way of Hope*, A Women's Christmas Retreat 2017 janrichardson.com

REFLECTIONS ON THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY December 28, 2025

Susan Gunn, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns Director, explores the Christmas story's implications in our lives and treatment of migrants and refugees.

The family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph must escape an evil ruler and live as refugees in Egypt for a few years. Living as refugees in Egypt at the time of Jesus mustn't have been easy. It's not easy to be a refugee in Egypt today. According to the UN, many refugees in Egypt come from Sudan and Syria and lack a stable source of income. Coupled with soaring inflation, it's hard to cover basic needs. Pope Francis famously taught us a four-verb response for meeting migrants and refugees: to welcome, to protect, to promote, and to integrate, emphasizing seeing people as individuals, not problems, and fostering a culture of encounter over fear.

Twenty-five years ago, among my neighbors in Washington, D.C., was a newly arrived refugee family from Vietnam. The father had been persecuted and imprisoned by the Communist government more than a decade earlier and so he and his wife and five children qualified for refugee resettlement in the United States. We became fast friends. Just as I tried to accompany them on many of their first-time experiences in the United States—first time getting a library card, first time riding the metro train—they opened a whole new world to me: the world of being a refugee, where everything is harder. Access to jobs, health care, schools—for refugees, they all require a lot of paperwork that often goes wrong.

The family of seven soon became a family of eight, living in a one-bedroom apartment. The father worked seven days a week and suffered from ulcers. The mother stayed home to care for the children and suffered from migraines. Most of the children figured out how to make it through their inner-city schools and went on to college. For one of the teenage children, it all was too difficult—the new language and culture, the poverty and pollution in the city, the exhaustion and homesickness in the family. She ran away to find work in a beach resort town, seeking solace in seeing the ocean and breathing the salt air similar to Vietnam. It was more than three years before she visited the family again.

I was just one person, trying to be their friend. When I think back on our times together, I remember all the ways I couldn't fix their problems. When they talk about our shared past, they remember the milestones: graduations, moving into a house, weddings, new babies, both in their family and in mine. I appreciate their wisdom for recognizing what matters most. We are like family. There's a line in a prayer for World Refugee Day that has always stayed with me: God of our Wandering Ancestors may refugees find a friend in me, and so make me worthy of the refuge I have found in you.

<https://maryknollogc.org/resources/feast-holy-family-9/>

Columban Bob Mosher writes: We Columban Fathers, Sisters and lay missionaries, together with the local Churches and humanitarian organizations, often welcomed fathers and mothers with small children, at the U.S.-Mexico border, and we were helped by many volunteers as well as the local authorities, police and firefighters to attend to their needs for shelter, food, clothing, hygiene and, occasionally, health. The presence of migrating families brought out the best in our whole community of El Paso, Texas. I always felt, in those days, that I was looking at the future of every town in the U.S., in the days of offering solidarity and respect to those fleeing their homelands.

The Holy Family, like so many migrating families today, were obliged to travel to Bethlehem while Mary was pregnant and about to give birth. Then--again, like many migrating families today--they had to get back on the road, to flee to Egypt, until the situation in their homeland calmed down, as we heard in today's Gospel reading. Even after King Herod died, they travelled once more, picking up and returning to Israel, and this time, seeking out the quieter, rural district of Galilee. Nazareth, in that district, was located a good distance away from the city of Jerusalem, its Temple, and from its sometimes cruel rulers. The son of Herod was probably an apple that did not fall far from the tree, so Galilee was the safest option within Israel.

So many families likewise come from afar, settle and live among us in the U.S. They contribute to the vitality and cultural life of our country, work their jobs and pay their taxes. But the security that they seek, and need, is fast disappearing, and about a half a million migrating people have been deported in the past year. The government hopes the remaining families of these men and women will self-deport, in order to keep themselves together, despite the decades of productive and assimilated lives in this country. Rather than treating them with suspicion and prejudice, or demonizing them as criminals and monsters, we are called by God to welcome the stranger among us, and to offer these families the conditions of safety and welcome that we would offer Jesus, Mary and Joseph themselves, providing the conditions that help keep families together.

On this feast of a very transient Holy Family, may we reaffirm the right of all families to settle and live among us, and pray for their safety, giving the children of our own families an example for them to follow by our solidarity and struggle to build a nation of many peoples, without racism or violence towards the foreigner.

ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP SAYS HE WAS 'INTIMIDATED' BY ISRAELI ARMY IN HOLY LAND

December 26, 2025: *The Archbishop of York, the Most Rev Stephen Cottrell says he was 'intimidated' by Israeli militias during his recent visit to the Holy Land. During his Christmas Day sermon yesterday at York Minster, Archbishop Cottrell revealed he was stopped at checkpoints and that militias told him he could not visit Palestinian families in the West Bank. His full homily text follows:*

"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him."- John 1. 9-11

On the road out of Chelmsford towards where I used to live in a place called Margaretting, there is a very long dual carriageway. Several miles long. Therefore, if you want to go anywhere, you have to travel in the direction of the traffic on your side of the road. Which sometimes means going a mile or two in the wrong direction.

At one end of this dual carriageway was the house where I used to live. At the other end was a large Tesco superstore. At Christmas a few years ago, well a few days before Christmas, my wife and I were shopping in the said branch of Tesco's. Later that same afternoon I was presiding at Nine Lessons and Carols in Chelmsford Cathedral. I needed to get home before the service to change into clerical attire and collect my robes. We had plenty of time. Or so we thought. When we came out of Tesco's, the car park was completely gridlocked. There had been an accident on the exit slip road, and none of the cars that day were going anywhere. Once I had worked this out, Rebecca stayed with the car and I had either to walk to the cathedral, sans robes, or walk home to collect them. And, I still thought I had enough time to do this but underestimated the length of the dual carriageway I now had to walk down. And about halfway, realising I was probably going to be late for the Service, I saw a couple coming out of their house to get into their car. I knew that they had to drive in the same direction as I was going and therefore had to almost go past my front door. Smiling, and looking as cheerfully unthreatening as I could muster, I gestured to them in what I thought was a friendly way, and began to ask them whether they might be able to help me.

Written on their faces was blind panic and terror. A stranger is talking to us. They couldn't get into their car fast enough. They drove away quickly, honking their horn at me. I wouldn't be surprised if they dialled 999.

Let's be clear, I don't really hold it against them. They didn't know who I was. My 'day-off' attire is, I admit, moderately scruffy. And the mantra 'stranger danger' is drilled into us from a very young age for good reasons.

But I am still troubled by the experience. What does it tell us about ourselves? Especially at Christmas, where at the heart of the nativity and the gospel that flows from it, there are so many stories of exile and welcome, in the letter to the Hebrews there is even the injunction that in welcoming strangers we might be entertaining angels (see Hebrews 13. 2) or then Jesus' stern warnings about what we do or don't do to those we encounter who are in need.

We have become, I can think of no other way of putting it, we have become fearful of each other, and especially fearful of strangers, or just people who aren't quite like us. We cannot see ourselves in them. And we, therefore, spurn a common humanity. Yes, of course, it is good and sensible for us to warn our children against the fearful strangers they do not know, and I really don't blame that couple for feeling a bit frightened of me that day, but I do worry, when our first instinct on encountering someone we don't know, is fear, and when, in order to keep the fear at bay, we build walls around ourselves, trying to secure a world where no stranger can get in, so that even when Jesus himself knocks at the door, like the good sensible people of Bethlehem itself, we politely refuse him. There is only room for us. For the medicine we so need in our world today to overcome this fear is Christ. And we know as we come close to him, we also come closer to each other. And we see and experience each other differently. We discover a common humanity in all our rich diversity. And then, and only then, we find a way of living in peace.

I visited Bethlehem this year. It was very quiet. Too quiet, because there just aren't pilgrims visiting at the moment; and the Christian communities who live there, and who rely on the income that pilgrims bring, are really struggling. Representatives of the local YMCA who do amazing work with persecuted Palestinian communities in the West Bank gave me a present as I left. It was a beautiful olive wood carving of the nativity scene: Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the stable on one side of the carving; the three Kings making their journey to Bethlehem on the other.

But a large grey wall bars their way, separates them from Christ. They are prohibited from entry. They can't get to Jesus. They are being turned away.

It was sobering to see this wall for real on my visit to the Holy Land and we were stopped at various checkpoints and intimidated by Israeli militias who told us that we couldn't visit Palestinian families in the occupied West Bank.

But this Christmas morning, here in York, as well as thinking about the walls that divide and separate the Holy Land, I'm also thinking of all the walls and barriers we erect across the whole of the world and, perhaps, most alarming, the ones we build around ourselves, the ones we construct in our hearts, and of how our fearful shielding of ourselves from strangers, the strangers we encounter in the homeless on our streets, refugees seeking asylum, young people starved of opportunity and growing up without hope for the future, means that we are in danger of failing to welcome Christ when he comes.

We don't mind kneeling at the representations of the Manger that we make in our churches and in our homes, like the beautiful nativity scene here in York Minster, but we don't kneel and adore his presence in others, especially the poor and the excluded, the vulnerable and the abused. Worse, we often end up blaming the poor for their poverty the jobless for their lack of work, the homeless for their lack of shelter, and the refugee for the war that forced them from their home or the climate change that devastated their land. Even in the Church which bears Christ's name, we have not always put the needs of the vulnerable first.

Therefore, this Christmas and especially at Christmas, we must find ways of balancing the needs of keeping everyone safe and yet at the same time seeing and adoring the face of Christ in the face of strangers, and especially in the faces of those who are in need; and then, dismantle, tear down the walls, which in keeping strangers out, keep Christ out as well. Then see and celebrate that in finding and seeing Christ and coming to the manger we see ourselves and our world as it is meant to be. Please make no mistake about it, Christmas is worth celebrating. I have a very big and lovely turkey waiting to go in the oven when I get home and lots of other lovely things on ice, and I will be rejoicing on this happy day. But I will also be trying to remember what this day means for me, for you, for our troubled, fearful and confused world. The God who makes himself vulnerable in the gift of this vulnerable child places the smallest, the least, the most fragile at the centre of his kingdom. He is the God who welcomes strangers - shepherds, magi, why even thee and me.

The doors to the Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem are very small. It is impossible, and I mean quite literally impossible, to step inside that Church without bending low. It's as if the entrance itself is saying, in order to enter here you must be smaller and you must be humbler and you must be ready to receive the gifts of this Christ as yourself, as a little child and with a trust that is all so easily lost to us.

But this child, this Christ-child, this beautiful Saviour, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, has come to find us. To show us our true humanity. To lift us up, and to help us see each other and smile in loving recognition.

Oh, come let us adore him. Amen.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/54002>

THE WEST BANK: A YEAR OF CONFINEMENT AND CONTROL

December 28, 2025 **Toine Van Teeffelen, Pax Christi partner and Educational Adviser in Palestine writes:**

Here are a number of unsettling developments on the West Bank in the past year that have received little attention in the mainstream media in general.

1. Traveling between cities has become problematic. This applies primarily to trips from the West Bank to Jerusalem. But few people are allowed to pass; with rare exceptions, Palestinian workers are no longer allowed to work in Jerusalem or Israel. But also the traffic within the West Bank itself has become unpredictable. Regional - and sometimes even local - commutes can cause delays for hours or force people into complicated detours. The consequences can be felt in all domains of daily life: economics, education, health care, family visits and much more.

2. International travel is also complicated. The Allenby Bridge - currently the only exit route for Palestinians from the West Bank - is unpredictable.

There are all kinds of "facilitating" services and additional payment options to make the passage through three authorities (the Palestinian National Authority, Israel and Jordan) more bearable. Nevertheless, the bridge can suddenly be closed, for reasons ranging from "safety" to staff strikes. For anyone who has to catch a flight from Amman, the whole company becomes nervous.

3. More and more areas within the West Bank are being closed off to Palestinians. Earlier this year, tens of thousands of refugees were driven out of three refugee camps in the north of the West Bank. In the Jordan Valley, tens of kilometers of a new Wall will be built, cutting farmers off from their land. The so-called "seam zone" between the Wall and the Green Line - the internationally recognized border between Israel and the West Bank - accounts for about 9% of the West Bank. This area is becoming increasingly less accessible to Palestinians, and residents are grappling with issues with residence status and freedom of movement. Many people, including school children, avoid traveling through settlements because it is dangerous. As a result, Palestinians are increasingly being pushed back into densely populated urban centers and their immediate surroundings.

4. During two years of destruction and deadly violence in Gaza, there was hardly any space for public celebrations on the West Bank. While the situation in Gaza remains extremely worrisome, there is slightly more space on the West Bank for festivities, such as the Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem. These celebrations are low-key and emphasize both Palestinian culture and the Christian message. In a broader sense, there are an increasing number of initiatives aimed at bringing Palestinian realities, culture and stories back to life.

5. Many people fear that what has happened in Gaza is a premonition of what awaits the West Bank. The atmosphere is one of caution and vigilance. Constant Israeli surveillance - via cameras, facial recognition technologies and other high-tech tools - combined with a comprehensive permitting system and the presence of collaborators, is increasingly turning the West Bank into a totalitarian occupation regime. People assume that the Israeli authorities know all the details of their personal lives. With Gaza, the West Bank has become a laboratory for testing military technologies - technologies that, despite the destruction and repression they cause, support Israel's military export industry and economy.

6. Against this backdrop, courageous Israeli and international volunteers are supporting Palestinian farmers, particularly in the Jordan Valley and areas south of Hebron, east of Ramallah and northern West Bank. In a classic non-violent manner, they guide and protect Palestinian herders, Bedouin and olive pickers from young settlers who often try to provoke confrontations. These confrontations then "justify" interventions by the Israeli army, leading to arrests (or deportations) of volunteers and sometimes the sealing of land on so-called security grounds - practically in preparation for takeover. International aid organizations are experiencing increasing difficulties in obtaining permits for their staff to work in the West Bank, let alone Gaza. At the same time, international presence remains essential for the protection of citizens.

7. This brings us to another remarkable phenomenon: the increasing interference of army and colonists. The distinction between the two is fading more and more. Armed settlers keep Palestinian cars under control, and settlements are often guarded by settlers in army uniform. Over 120 outposts have been set up in recent years, usually small, makeshift structures on hilltop to harass Palestinian villages or farmers. These outposts are then "secured" by the army and eventually legalized for settlement. The same process occurred in some of the 19 new settlements legalized by the Israeli government a few days ago.

8. There is a clear sense of urgency among the nationalist right wing (a majority) in Israel. People are trying to take full advantage of Trump's term, allowing colonization of the West Bank, if not actively encouraged, even now cracks within parts of the MAGA movement are visible in support of Israel's politics.

9. Palestinians are economically vulnerable. The Palestinian economy depends on the Israeli economy. Palestinian banks can make international transactions exclusively through Israeli banks. Many families rely on salaries from the Palestinian Authority, but receive only a portion of what they receive. Politically weak the PNA has been designated to international financial support, which has decreased sharply. At the same time, people are increasingly being pushed toward digital financial transactions, which poses a major problem for those unfamiliar with computers or smartphone technology.

10. Finally a noticeable non-development. It would be obvious that the West Bank will play an important role in the rebuilding of Gaza. Palestinian professionals and institutions on the West Bank are well positioned to do that: they share language, culture, proximity, trust and expertise. Israel's policy of complete separation between Gaza and the West Bank prevents this cooperation, while the U.S. keeps the issue going. Because of that, a vital and natural form of Palestinian solidarity and reconstruction remains deliberately blocked.

Bethlehem, 23/12/25

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/54010>

PEACE SUNDAY JANUARY 18, 2026

Pope Leo has announced the theme – ‘Peace be with you all: Towards an ‘unarmed and disarming peace’ – and Pax Christi are putting together liturgy and prayer resources to help you mark the day and reflect on this vital theme in your parish or group. Pope Leo has continued the exhortation of Pope Francis that the call to live nonviolent ‘disarmed’ lives is core to Catholic Social Teaching and the key to peace in a world scarred by violent conflict.

Pax Christi Chair Kathryn Lydon writes: Let’s make Pope Leo’s message our manifesto for 2026, beginning with Peace Sunday, when we have a great opportunity to involve our local parish, community and school. Another ‘gift’ to Pax Christi is that the Bishops of England & Wales allow us to take a collection, which is key to raising funds for our work. Let us make full use of both of these opportunities. Here are a few suggestions, to be adapted to your own circumstances.

YOUR PEACE SUNDAY GUIDE AND ‘TO DO’ LIST

Step One: Read the Pope’s message, available on Pax Christi and Vatican websites from early December. Familiarise yourself with the tools for Peace Sunday on the Pax Christi website, for the liturgy (including homily notes) prayer cards, a short talk, resources for schools.

Step Two December / early January

Contact your local church, the parish priest or the Dean of your cathedral. Each will have received a letter urging them to support Peace Sunday and some will have received a pack with all the resources.

Ask for • Peace Sunday to be celebrated on 18 January or another date

- a collection or a donation from the parish, and
- permission to give a short talk (see draft script on website)

Offer • liturgy resources: notes for homily, prayers of intercession, resources for children’s liturgy

- to contact key people e.g. choir, leader of children’s liturgy
- prayer cards or a stall. Order or print resources needed

Step Three January

Contact people responsible for liturgy and share ideas and resources

Organise help with collection

Seek help from others with the short talk if your parish has many Masses

Share resources with local school Display poster (see back page of Justpeace)

Send information for newsletter or parish website

Step Four Peace Sunday 18 January

Give talk, organise collection, give out prayer cards

Arrange for photos and seek permission to use them

Step Five Follow up

Send ‘Thank you’ notice for newsletter and individual messages to helpers

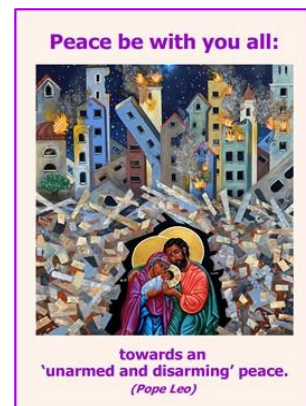
Suggest parish membership of Pax Christi, a prayer vigil, speaker, etc.

Join Pax Christi’s post-Peace Sunday Zoom meeting and/or send a brief report to the Pax Christi office

Deepen your own understanding of the Peace Sunday message and share it

<https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-Dec-Jan-2026.pdf>

<https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Pax-Christi-Peace-Sunday-2026-Resources-1.pdf>



BLESSING

That peace
will rise like bread
we can always hope.

That justice
will flow like wine
we can always hope.

That the table
will make strangers kin
we can always hope.

That our hope
will rise like bread
we can always pray.



© Jan Richardson

from *Walking the Way of Hope*, A Women’s Christmas Retreat 2017 janrichardson.com

IAN LINDEN: A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR 2026

Dec 29th, 2025: Rutger Bregman, the Dutch historian and author chosen for this year's Reith lectures, gave them the title Moral Revolution, describing a wicked world, venal elites, and a degraded politics. He aims to make goodness "fashionable again" and has an enviable rhetorical and narrative style to that end. His is a message primarily directed at civil society not to our own - unfashionable - Government, telling a hopeful story with which to end a grim 2025. From the applause, the four talks went down well with the live audience.

Despite having a Protestant pastor for a father, Bregman believes goodness to be found in human nature, and following his philosophical hero, Bertrand Russell, asserts that no external transcendental agency exists to put it there. To collectively shape society, to act ethically, we need "pity for the unbearable suffering of mankind", a "longing for love", and a "search for knowledge" derived from the well-springs of goodness in the human heart, from a scientific naturalism. And these enduring impulses directing a purposeful life, he claims, are what uniquely make us human.

Bregman spoke of his Christian childhood, loss of faith, then discovery of an affective humanism, a history of small networks of virtuous men and women making the world a better place: the anti-slavery movement, the suffragettes, the campaign for civil rights and, yes, the twelve apostles, historical changes as a "reservoir of hope". His is a timely message for a secular world in deep trouble. A yes-we-can for NGOs, from small beginnings a long march to critical mass and changes in government policy. And finally an agnostic nod beyond an earlier confident atheism, maybe there is more to it all.

The sequence of Bregman's four talks followed a broadly see-judge-and-act pattern, the last exploring the threats posed by AI and the unchecked power of the Silicon Valley barons. But, as you consider these lectures, some of their gloss wears off; a lack of new thinking and depth becomes apparent. The exploration of what the common good might mean and the ethical connection between the personal and the social lack coherence. Nor are the religious sources of Bregman's thinking fully acknowledged.

The requirements for Moral Revolution, compassion, love, search for understanding, would not sound out of place in a papal allocution or parochial Sunday sermon. But the continuing contribution of the Catholic Church to this theme of personal and social moral regeneration is absent: no mention of the body of Catholic social teaching, originating in the 1890s and elaborated by the Church through different historical contexts until today. For Bregman, the early Fabians at the end of the 19th century, not Leo XIII's 1891 Rerum Novarum, committing the Church to workers' rights, are worth discussing. Nor is there a single contemporary Christian example of his central theme, a small networked group tackling one of the 'monsters' of economic change. The growing international network of Religious Sisters, strong in his homeland Netherlands, confronting the dark side of globalization, human trafficking, would have been one outstanding example.

Bregman's moral revolution demands the nurturing of virtue, its application in daily life and practical politics, played out through history. A more glaring omission is his apparent lack of interest, apart from a quick genuflection to Aquinas and Aristotle, in the historical development of ethics. Like a lecture on the 19th century novel with no word of Dickens, neither is there any mention of the great Scottish Catholic philosopher of ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre - who sadly died in May this year, and his 1981 After Virtue which brings Aquinas' virtue ethics to life for our contemporary world.

MacIntyre gave "Catholic Instead of What?" as the title to a lecture at Notre Dame University in Indiana in November 2012. Instead of naturalism based on science, he proposes conformity to natural law for a humanity, fallen and separated from God. His focus and emphases are very different from Bregman's: the nature of our humanity from womb to grave emphasizing the justice which we owe notably to the child. He tells a story about how the common good, the personal and social, and indeed the economic, might be coherently thought about and acted on.

Here is a flavour. "Parents can give their children what they owe to them only if they have economic means that enable them to house, clothe, and feed those children; have the time and energy to play with those children and to tell them stories. Children deprived of such homes find it often difficult and sometimes impossible to learn from their teachers in school, no matter how good those teachers. The children who don't learn are unable to become educated citizens, and a society with a significant portion of badly educated or uneducated citizens is always a defective society, one in which it becomes difficult or even impossible to arrive at rational agreement about common goods and, therefore, about the requirements of justice and how they are to be achieved". A far more coherent and radical story than told by Bregman.

"What", MacIntyre goes on to ask, "would it be like to live in a society where not to meet the needs of children was intolerable". Parents would have a sufficient income, be properly paid in family-friendly jobs, to achieve excellence as parents and teachers. And education would give young people growing up the confidence to find their own voice amidst today's multiplicity of voices. A radical manifesto for a diverse society.

The Labour Government's indecisive tactics, lack of a compelling narrative and a plausible strategy for combatting inequality and the high cost of living, tackling economic stagnation and widespread youth anxiety, will likely receive a hefty punishment in May 2026 local elections. Where will the Labour Party find the coherent big story in which their different, worthy, incremental changes could be fitted? A focus on answering the question "Labour Party Instead of What?" decisively with vision and courage will help.

Rutger Bregman has a simple story to tell: one about what the little platoons of NGOs and their networks can achieve. His approach is deductive: here is the general idea and here are some examples derived from it, anti-slavery, the Fabians, the challenge of AI. It's not that simple. Finding a way forward is complex. Government - and Bregman - need at least to acknowledge the distinctive contribution of Catholic Social Teaching and the radical Christian vision of thinkers such as MacIntyre, and in 2026 tell a better story.

• *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.*

<https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/a-modest-proposal-for-2026>

LINKS

Read Professor Ian Linden's latest blogs: www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/

Rutger Bregman - Reith Lectures - Moral Revolution: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002mmrv

Alasdair MacIntyre - Catholic Instead of What lecture: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjYLM1lw47Q

COLUMBANS SCHOOLS COMPETITION 2026

Ellen Teague Sept 22, 2025: The Columban Missionaries in Britain are inviting students aged 13–18 to enter the 2026 Schools Media Competition. The competition was launched on 21 September, World Peace Day with the theme: **"Becoming a refugee is never a choice. But how we respond is."** – United Nations Secretary General Secretary, António Guterres. Columban missionaries internationally have a mission priority of supporting Migrants and Refugees. This echoes Catholic Social Teaching which calls us to 'welcome the stranger'. Pope Leo told diplomats in May 2025: "My own story is that of a citizen, the descendant of immigrants, who in turn chose to emigrate..... All of us, in the course of our lives, can find ourselves healthy or sick, employed or unemployed, living in our native land or in a foreign country, yet our dignity always remains unchanged."

The Columbans are looking for students in Britain (aged 13-18 inclusive, parental permission required) to submit an original piece of writing or an original image on the theme. They invite young people to explore perceptions of people seeking sanctuary in Britain, considering practical examples of welcome and solidarity. The competition aims to increase young people's compassion and understanding of journeys of displaced people seeking safety in another country. How can we respect diversity and respond with love to those seeking refuge and safety? Can we be inspired by real-life stories of resilience and hope, Scripture, or Catholic Social Teaching? How can we empathise with the experience of individuals and families being separated from the place they call home?

The competition closes on the 14th February 2026 and competition winners will be announced on the 9th March. Cash prizes will be awarded to the winners and the first prize is an impressive £300! Students will find the Columban Competition website a useful resource: <https://www.columbancompetition.com/>

This is the ninth annual Columban Schools Media Competition. Past themes have focused on Migrants, Climate Change, Throwaway Culture, Racism, 21st Century Changemakers, Peacemaking, Biodiversity and 'Jubilee: Pilgrims of Hope.' Be inspired by some of the powerful articles written by young people in previous competitions – follow the link here:

<https://columbans.co.uk/filter/schools-media-competition/>

<https://columbans.co.uk/education/17074/columbans-launch-schools-competition-2026/>

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/53229>

DIARY

JANUARY 2025

8 Merseyside Pax Christi meeting 2 -4 pm at Quaker Meeting House, School Lane, Liverpool. L1 3BT New members welcome. Contact Jan Harper 07591082195 janharper20211@outlook.com

9-11 Christians Aware Annual Conference – Ears to hear Listening to minorities Tel: 0116 254 0770 Email: barbara@christiansaware.org.uk Website: www.christiansaware.co.uk

18 Peace Sunday Pax Christi <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-Dec-Jan-2026.pdf>

18 -25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity theme 'One body, one spirit' <https://cte.org.uk/wpcu2026/>

20 Lancashire Movement for Recovery summit St Luke's church, Bank Top, Blackburn BB2 1TA Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/lancashire-movement-summit-tickets-1659119694669?aff=oddtcreator>

FEBRUARY

12 Merseyside Pax Christi meeting 2-4 pm (second Thursday of each month) See January 8 above

14 Columban Schools Media Competition deadline for entries <https://www.columbancompetition.com/>

18 Ash Wednesday Merseyside Pax Christi Walk of Witness through Liverpool City Centre. Start at St Luke's Bombed out church at the top of Bold St. contact Jan Harper 07591 082 195 janharper20211@outlook.com nearer the time for more details

MARCH

6 World Day of Prayer 'I have come to give you rest' Nigeria <https://www.wwdp.org.uk/>

7 Winners of Columban Schools Media Competition announced <https://www.columbancompetition.com/>

12 Pax Christi Merseyside meeting See January 8 above

- See current NJPN news here: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/news/>
- 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 or contact ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org 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/njpn-north-west/winter-mouthpeace-2025-2026/attachment/mouthpeace-winter-25-corrected/>

The views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of NJPN

NOTICE – forthcoming changes

NJPN would like to thank the Columbans for handling the mailing of our newsletter with Vocation for Justice for many years. With the increasing cost of postage and the advances of electronic media the Columbans will move to an online newsletter after the Winter edition of Vocation for Justice. In future our newsletter will be handled just by NJPN, and due to data protection rules we are unable to receive subscribers names from the Columbans database.

We are also planning on sending out an online version of our newsletter, so to ensure that you receive your copy, please email us at admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk - just put 'NEWSLETTER' as the title and we will add your email address to our list of subscribers.

For those of you who do not have access to an email version of the newsletter, please telephone us on 020 7901 4864 and leave your name, address and postcode, and we will post you out a copy or you can write to us at 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX. A donation to cover postage/printing costs would be appreciated if you are able to do so.

Grateful thanks to everyone who has supported us over the years, and we look forward to continuing to inform you of our work and current issues in a more environmentally-friendly fashion in the future.

IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE

This notice relates to the seasonal newsletter produced by NJPN and **NOT** this monthly North West NJPN E Bulletin which is already sent electronically and is also available to read or download from the NJPN website at <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/category/njpn-north-west/>
