

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

## **DISARMING THE ABYSS: A GOSPEL NONVIOLENCE RESPONSE TO THE ATTACKS ON IRAN – SR KATRINA ALTON**

As missiles streaked across the skies of the Middle East and airstrikes pounded cities from Tehran to the Gulf, Christian leaders responded not with calls for retaliation, but with a renewed appeal for peace grounded in Gospel nonviolence. In the wake of coordinated attacks by the United States and Israel on Iranian targets, and Iran's swift reprisals, voices from Rome to Jerusalem have insisted that peace cannot be forged through the raging heat of war.

During the Sunday Angelus, Pope Leo XIV expressed "deep concern" over the escalating violence. "Stability and peace are not built with mutual threats, nor with weapons, which sow destruction, pain, and death," he warned, urging leaders to assume their moral responsibility before the spiral of violence becomes "an irreparable abyss." His appeal reflects the heart of Gospel nonviolence: a conviction that authentic security arises not from domination, but from dialogue rooted in justice and the dignity of every human person.

From the epicentre of the crisis, The Most Reverend Dr. Hosam E. Naoum, Primate of the Anglican Province of Jerusalem & the Middle East, described communities "huddled in shelters, fearing for their lives." Every nation now engaged in the conflict lies within his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Yet even as bombs fall, he calls the Church to remember Christ's words: "Blessed are the peacemakers." Rejecting the "spirit of fear," he urges Christians to be "Bridge Builders," refusing to see neighbours in Tehran, Tel Aviv, or Gulf military bases as enemies.

Their appeals echo the longstanding witness of Pax Christi International, which has condemned the strikes as an escalation that spreads fear and suffering. Grounded in the belief that violence begets only deeper wounds, Pax Christi reiterates that peace cannot be imposed through force or foreign intervention.

In fidelity to Gospel nonviolence, Pax Christi International calls on the international community to:

- Act to immediately de-escalate hostilities
- Uphold international law and the UN Charter
- Return to dialogue and negotiated solutions
- Protect civilians and respect human dignity

These are not abstract ideals but urgent moral imperatives. The Gospel reveals a God who breaks cycles of violence not through overwhelming force, but through self-giving love. In a region trembling under the threat of wider war, Christians are summoned to embody that love through prayer, advocacy, and courageous peace-making.

At this perilous hour, the choice before the world is stark: continue down the path of mutual annihilation, or heed the call to disarm hearts, rhetoric, and weapons alike. The way of the Nonviolent Jesus leaves no doubt which path leads to life.

**Sr Katrina Alton Pax Christi National Chaplain** 2 March 2026

<https://paxchristi.org.uk/2026/03/02/disarming-the-abyss-a-gospel-nonviolence-response-to-the-attacks-on-iran-sr-katrina-alton/>

## **FAITH LEADERS WARN AGAINST WAR IN IRAN AND URGE PEACE AND DIPLOMACY**

**Pope Leo** has expressed "deep concern" over the war in Iran and the Middle East, warning of "immense tragedy" if violence escalates out of control recent events in the Middle East and Iran. Speaking yesterday at his weekly Angelus address, he said: "Stability and peace are not built with mutual threats, nor with weapons, which sow destruction, pain, and death, but only through a reasonable, authentic, and responsible dialogue... Faced with the possibility of a tragedy of enormous proportions, I address to the parties involved a heartfelt appeal to assume the moral responsibility to stop the spiral of violence before it becomes an irreparable abyss!"

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2026-03/pope-leo-xiv-angelus-appeal-peace-middle-east-iran.html>

**Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani**, who fled Iran after the Islamic revolution when her brother was murdered, said it was unclear whether the military action complied with international law and warned it would "wreak havoc and bring death and destruction" across the region. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme, she said that it was difficult not to have a glimmer of hope that the regime will end, but there was no obvious or credible alternative ready to take its place: "My concern is that the IRGC will simply find somebody in due course to replace Khamenei and we'll go back to where we were, but simply under different leadership."

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002s2x6?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002s2x6?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)

**The World Council of Churches** has expressed grave concern at the US–Israeli strikes on Iran and the resulting retaliatory action, calling for an immediate cessation of all military action in the region. In a statement, WCC general secretary Rev Prof Jerry Pillay, said: “This dangerous spiral of violence places millions of civilians at immediate risk, undermines regional and international security, and threatens already fragile economic and social stability across the Middle East”.

**The Chief Rabbi, Sir Ephraim Mirvis**, issued a statement on Twitter / X, saying: “We pray for the State of Israel and for her citizens who right now are being targeted by a barrage of deadly missiles. We pray for those citizens of Iran, who have seen tens of thousands of their people murdered by a regime more dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel than the welfare of its own people, and who yearn for a new era of freedom. We pray for the success of the forces which stand in defence of our people and who seek to guarantee that peace and stability will reign in our volatile and vulnerable world. We pray for the day when no nation will ever need to raise sword against nation”.

**The Muslim World League secretary general, Sheikh Dr Mohammed Al-Issa**, who is also chairman of the Organisation of Muslim Scholars, strongly condemned the Iranian aggression against several Arab countries. Based in Saudi Arabia, he described the attacks as a blatant violation of religious values, international laws, and humanitarian norms, and he called on the international community to confront these actions with absolute firmness and resolve. [https://themwl.org/en/node/41352?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://themwl.org/en/node/41352?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)

**Source: Religion Media Centre March 2, 2026** [religionmediacentre+morning-news-bulletin@substack.com](mailto:religionmediacentre+morning-news-bulletin@substack.com)

## **IPPNW CONDEMNS STRIKES AGAINST IRAN, CALLS FOR RETURN TO NEGOTIATIONS**

February 28, 2026

### **STATEMENT**

“International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) unequivocally condemns the attack on Iran by the United States and Israel and calls on them to cease immediately all further use of force and to return to the negotiating table.

The unprovoked strikes, ostensibly to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear warhead, are incredibly dangerous and counterproductive. The conflict threatens the lives of large numbers of civilians in Iran and Israel. Attacking Iranian facilities could cause widespread devastation and significant releases of radioactivity. And the situation could escalate into a regional war and ultimately lead to the use of nuclear weapons — the very thing the world most needs to prevent.

For decades, the US and Israel have rejected multiple opportunities to seek a peaceful resolution to the legitimate concerns that Iran may be developing a nuclear weapons capability to counter Israel’s illegal clandestine possession of nuclear weapons. This has included refusal of multiple attempts by the United Nations and States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to negotiate a Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. During his first term, US President Trump summarily abandoned the Iran Nuclear Deal negotiated in 2015 that had successfully contained Iran’s nuclear program.

Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi, who had been mediating the current round of negotiations between the U.S. and Iran condemned the attacks saying, “Active and serious negotiations have, once again, been undermined. Neither the interests of the United States nor the cause or world peace are served.”

There is no military solution to the problem of nuclear weapons proliferation anywhere in the world, particularly in the Middle East. The need for regional and international efforts to negotiate a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East have never been more urgent. The only way to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons – and to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again – is for all nations to join the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) that will eliminate all existing nuclear weapons and prevent all states from acquiring or reacquiring them in the future.”

<https://peaceandhealthblog.com/2026/02/28/ippnw-condemns-strikes-against-iran-calls-for-return-to-negotiations/>

## **REACTIONS TO US AND ISRAELI STRIKES ON IRAN**

March 1, 2026

**UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres**, condemned the military escalation, and warned that international peace and security were being undermined. “The use of force by the United States and Israel against Iran, and the subsequent retaliation by Iran across the region, undermine international peace and security,” he said in a statement. “I call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and de-escalation. Failing to do so risks a wider regional conflict with grave consequences for civilians and regional stability.”



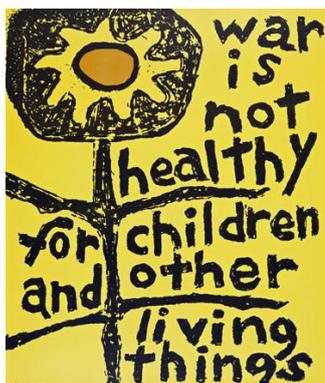
## WORDS WHISPERED TO A CHILD UNDER SIEGE

*No, we are not going to die.  
The sounds you hear  
knocking the windows and chipping the paint  
from the ceiling, that is a game  
the world is playing.  
Our task is to crouch in the dark as long as we can  
and count the beats of our own hearts.  
Good. Like that. Lay your hand  
on my heart and I'll lay mine on yours.  
Which one of us wins  
is the one who loves the game the most  
while it lasts.  
Yes, it is going to last.  
You can use your ear instead of your hand.  
Here, on my heart.  
Why is it beating faster? For you. That's all.  
I always wanted you to be born  
and so did the world.  
No, those aren't a stranger's footsteps in the house.  
Yes, I'm here. We're safe.  
Remember chess? Remember  
hide-and-peek?  
The song your mother sang? Let's sing that one.  
She's still with us, yes. But you have to sing  
without making a sound. She'd like that.  
No, those aren't footsteps.  
Sing. Sing louder.  
Those aren't footsteps.  
Let me show you how I cried when you were born.  
Those aren't footsteps.  
Those aren't sirens.  
Those aren't flames.  
Close your eyes. Like chess. Like hide-and-peek.  
When the game is done you get another life.*

– Joseph Fasano

• **Joseph Fasano** is a writer and educator. Fasano writes, "Why on earth do we not understand that this is what war does to children? I hope these words do what words can do sometimes."

<http://josephfasano.net/>



## FOUR YEARS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

FEBRUARY 24, 2026

Every year this day opens something inside me that I spend the rest of the year trying to keep contained.

People say "four years." As if time makes it smaller.

It doesn't. It lives in the body. In the nervous system. In the way your heart jumps at certain sounds. In the way sleep changes. In the way you never feel completely settled again.

For Ukrainians, this is not just a date. It is the day the ground disappeared under our feet.

Most of us lost people. Many of us lost homes.

Most of us lost entire futures we had carefully built.

All of us lost a sense of safety that can never be fully restored.

I left Eastern Ukraine when staying could have cost everything. There was no dramatic moment. Just a quiet, devastating clarity that life as I knew it might be over. Forever.

You don't "move on" from something like that. You learn to function with it.

To my Ukrainian friends

– if today feels overwhelming, if you feel exhausted, if you don't understand why your body is heavy - you are not weak. You are carrying a huge trauma.

To my Welsh friends

– please understand, this is not history for us. It is ongoing. It is destabilising in ways that are hard to explain unless you have lived it. Your care, your patience, your solidarity matter more than you know.

Today is not about politics. It is about people.

It is about grief. It is about endurance.

And it is about remembering that behind every headline, there are nervous systems still trying to feel safe and alive again.

If you are struggling today – I am too. And we are still here.

**YULIA**

• Yulia left her homeland in Ukraine in search of a safer life in Wales for her family.

Read more in the January NW NJPN E Bulletin:

<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-north-west/nw-njpn-e-bulletin-for-january-2026/>

## THE PLIGHT OF MAKOKO: A CATHOLIC RECKONING WITH STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND GLOBAL INDIFFERENCE

In late January, Lagos State authorities carried out a forced clearance of Makoko—one of West Africa’s most historic water-based communities—an operation that follows a pattern tragically familiar across the Global South. Families were evicted without warning. Homes were burned, in some cases while people were still inside. The Lagos State government claims the operation was necessary because of overhead powerlines. Local activists, journalists, and human-rights observers offer a different account: land wanted for luxury development was cleared by force.

One Makoko resident, speaking to local reporters after her home was destroyed, described fleeing by canoe with her children as flames spread along the waterfront. “They did not tell us to leave,” she said. “They came and burned everything. Where are we supposed to go?” Her question remains unanswered.

Makoko is not an isolated tragedy. It is part of a global story in which the urban poor—often Black, Indigenous, or otherwise marginalised—are displaced in the name of “modernisation.” What makes this case particularly urgent is how little attention it has received in Western Catholic media. The suffering of African communities rarely becomes news unless it intersects with Western debates. Extreme poverty, state violence, and racialised development do not trend.

This silence is not neutral. It reflects a deeper imbalance in the global Catholic imagination. The Church professes itself to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—yet our media ecosystems often remain Western in focus, Western in concern, and Western in emotional bandwidth. The people of Makoko belong to the same Body of Christ as the faithful in London, Chicago, or Manila. Their suffering is not peripheral to the Church’s mission; it is central to it.

Catholic social teaching offers a clear lens for reading what happened in Lagos. The preferential option for the poor is not a slogan but a demand: economic development cannot be pursued at the expense of human dignity. Pope Francis has repeatedly warned against “sacrifice zones”—places where the poor are treated as disposable in the pursuit of profit. Makoko has become one such zone.

The racial dimension cannot be ignored. Communities like Makoko are rarely protected by the political or economic systems that surround them. Their vulnerability is not accidental; it is produced. When governments clear land for elite interests, when the poor are displaced without consultation or compensation, when entire neighbourhoods are erased in the name of progress, the Church must name this for what it is: structural sin.

Western Catholics often debate questions of gender, sexuality, and ecclesial identity with great intensity. Yet the daily realities of the world’s poorest communities—forced evictions, environmental injustice, state violence, and economic exclusion—receive far less attention. This imbalance distorts our moral priorities. It narrows our field of vision. It risks turning the Church inward at precisely the moment when the world needs its outward-facing witness.

Makoko challenges us to recover a global Catholic conscience. Saint Paul’s call to respect civil authority never meant acquiescing to injustice. When governments violate the dignity of the poor, the Church is obligated to speak. When communities are burned out of their homes, the Body of Christ must respond. When racialised development destroys the lives of the vulnerable, silence becomes complicity.

The people of Makoko are not a footnote to the Church’s mission. They are its heart.

•*James Gordon Reid Haveloch-Jones is an educational consultant and applied theologian with a background in History and Theology. He is an Honorary Associate Fellow of St George’s House, Windsor Castle, and a contracted contributing writer for The God Who Speaks, an initiative of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. He also writes for Church Times and Premier Christianity, and serves as a Trustee of the Heythrop Association, University of London.*

[www.jamesgordonreid.co.uk](http://www.jamesgordonreid.co.uk)

### See also

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/jan/26/lagos-waterfront-demolition-makoko-displacement>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce3epxznzzyo>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/16/world/africa/nigeria-makoko-fishing-village-destroyed.html>

## **WOMEN PEACEMAKERS: CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**Sr Katrina Alton, National Chaplain to Pax Christi England and Wales** February 25, 2026

On March 8th at 7pm, you are warmly invited to gather for an International Women's Day celebration that is both prayerful and theologically rich, rooted in the Church's growing reflection on Gospel nonviolence and the call to become peacemakers in a wounded world.

Taking inspiration from the 2026 World Peace Day message of Pope Leo: "Towards an 'unarmed and disarming' peace," the evening will explore what it means for women of faith to witness to Christ's peace in contexts often shaped by conflict, polarisation and fear. Rather than understanding peace simply as the absence of war, we will reflect on peace as a deeply Christian vocation: a way of living grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

In recent decades, Catholic theology has increasingly reclaimed Gospel nonviolence not as a marginal ideal, but as central to discipleship. From the Sermon on the Mount to the Cross, Christ reveals a power that does not dominate but transforms. His refusal to meet violence with violence challenges what theologians describe as the "myth of redemptive violence" - the assumption that force can ultimately save us. To journey towards an "unarmed and disarming" peace, then, is to allow our hearts, relationships, and institutions, to be reshaped by this deeper logic of mercy and justice.

In my role as National Chaplain to Pax Christi E&W, I will be hosting the event. Drawing on Scripture, Catholic social teaching, and our experience, I will be joined by a distinguished panel: Christabel McCooey, barrister and tribunal judge, committed to holding power to account. Siobhan Burke, tutor at St Bede's Pastoral Centre in York, who offers accompaniment and formation to lay leaders, and MaryAnne Francalanza FCJ, Director of the FCJ Centre for Spirituality and EcoJustice in London, whose work brings contemplation and social engagement into fruitful dialogue.

Together, they will help us consider how women's wisdom, attentiveness and moral courage can contribute to building communities marked by justice, reconciliation, and Gospel nonviolence.

All are very welcome to join this evening of prayer, reflection and dialogue. Bring your wisdom, intuition, and holy attentiveness, as we reclaim the wisdom of redemptive nonviolence in a world crying out for healing and hope.

You can register to attend here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/22Qt5xztTaUlw9Z4bPSSA#/registration>

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/54436>

## **HEALING FROM CONFLICT Joint Peace Conference**

24th-26th April 2026, Kents Hill Park, Milton Keynes



This ecumenical conference with Pax Christi, FoR, CHIPS, APF and Church and Peace invites speakers and participants to explore the question of how individuals and communities truly heal after conflict to pave the way for peace, justice and hope.

Over a weekend of learning, reflection, and connection, we will consider how genuine healing can pave the way for communities to flourish in peace, justice, and hope.

The programme will include keynote talks, panel discussions, practical workshops, and creative sessions, alongside dedicated space to meet others who share a passion for peacemaking.

Together, we will draw on experience, wisdom, and imagination to explore pathways toward healing and renewed community life. It will include prayer and worship, yet we warmly welcome participants and speakers of all faiths and beliefs. Live interpretation will be provided between French, English and German for the main sessions. Speakers to be announced soon!

For more information and to book your place <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/jointpeaceconference/1973949>  
Full weekend individual room: £230. Day tickets are available from between £25 and £90.

Please get in touch with Aisling at [education@paxchristi.org.uk](mailto:education@paxchristi.org.uk) if you would like to know more about the possibility of a subsidised place.

## **INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS 21 MARCH**

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 21 March the International Day of Forests (IDF) in 2012. The Day celebrates and raises awareness of the importance of all types of forests. On each International Day of Forests, countries are encouraged to undertake local, national and international efforts to organize activities involving forests and trees, such as tree planting campaigns.



The theme for each International Day of Forests is chosen by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

### **Celebrating forests and economies**

Forests and economies is the theme of the 2026 International Day of Forests, celebrating the essential roles of forests in driving economic prosperity. These roles go well beyond income and jobs from forest production and the trade of renewable raw materials and foods: forests also sustain family and community agriculture, enhance agricultural productivity, and safeguard healthy watersheds.

With many countries seeking to move toward a sustainable bioeconomy, forest products offer nature-based solutions as replacements for carbon-intensive materials while generating new economic opportunities.

### **Key messages**

#### **Forests power economies**

From vital ecosystem services associated with water, climate and soils, to ecotourism, energy supply and raw materials, forests contribute trillions to the global economy and support millions of jobs worldwide.

#### **An estimated USD 44 trillion – more than half of world gross domestic product – depends on nature, including forests**

Forest landscapes reduce the cost of producing clean water and, by storing carbon and moderating temperatures, help protect economies from climate-related disasters that can cost billions.

#### **The emerging bioeconomy has forests at its heart**

Wood and bamboo can be used as renewable replacements for carbon-intensive materials such as steel, concrete and plastics.

#### **Demand for forest products is at an all-time high**

About 4 billion cubic metres of wood are being produced per year, with demand projected to rise as the population grows and the world seeks to replace carbon-intensive products with renewables – potentially requiring an additional 1 billion cubic metres of industrial roundwood by 2050.

#### **Up to 5.8 billion people worldwide use non-wood forest products to support their livelihoods and well-being**

Non-wood forest products, including foods, medicines, resins, ornamental plants and fodder, are worth at least USD 9.41 billion per year globally and have enormous potential to grow.

#### **Woodfuel makes substantial contributions to economies at both the household and industrial scales**

Fuelwood and charcoal provide essential energy for cooking and heating to more than 2 billion people worldwide and support the livelihoods of hundreds of millions more, while modern woodfuel such as pellets are used at an industrial scale for power and heat applications.

#### **Healthy forests mean healthy communities**

Forests are the economic backbone of many rural communities by supplying foods, medicines, fuel and income, as well as benefits such as cooling effects, clean water and soil stabilization.

#### **Investing in forest conservation, restoration and sustainable use pays off**

Forest loss is expensive, leading to soil erosion, flooding, costly climate impacts and productivity loss that often far outweigh short-term economic gains.

<https://www.fao.org/international-day-of-forests/en>

**REFLECTION Rev. Benjamin Cremer**

February 18, 2026

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the season of Lent as the church journeys toward Easter.

I have always been struck by how much of the Christian church burns the palm branches from the previous year's Palm Sunday for the ashes of the current year's Ash Wednesday.

For me, the symbolism is powerful. We waved palm branches as Jesus entered our city riding on a donkey. We cried "hosanna in the highest," yet when he turned out to be the kind of king we didn't want, we were found saying "crucify him!" later that week.

We wanted him to ride into our city on a war horse, yet he rode into town on a donkey instead, a symbol of peace.

We wanted him to lead an armed militia to overthrow Rome, yet he led a band of fishermen, tax collectors, noble women, and children instead.

We wanted him to vanquish our enemies, yet he came in calling us to love our enemies instead.

We kept waiting for him to tell us to take up our swords and follow him, but he called us to take up our crosses and follow him instead.

So we put him on a cross ourselves, trading him in for a known insurrectionist who would lead the kind of revolt against Rome we actually wanted (Barabbas, whose name means "Son of the Father."). We traded in the true Son of the Father for the son of the father we preferred.

Oh, how often we still do that today.

I'm reminded of the quote by the American psychologist Gustave Mark Gilbert who observed high-ranking Nazi leaders during the Nuremberg trials. He said, "I told you once that I was searching for the nature of evil. I think I've come close to defining it: a lack of empathy. It's the one characteristic that connects all the defendants. A genuine incapacity to feel with their fellow man. Evil, I think, is the absence of empathy."

Jesus is the Word of God who became human and dwelt among us (John 1). God experienced the fullness of human life, suffering, and death out of love for us. Yet there are those who claim to worship this very God today who claim empathy is itself an evil rather than its absence being a root of evil.

The ashes of our burned palm branches represent our misplaced expectations of the kind of king Jesus should be in contrast to the kind of king he came to be for us.

As we begin this journey of Lent, may we begin by acknowledging the ashes of our best laid plans laid to waste. May we repent from all the ways we have expected Christ and his kingdom to look like the kings and empires of this world. May we rediscover the hope of Jesus, who brings breath where we only see dust and life where we only see death. Not through the violent forceful ways of the world, but through the self-sacrificial love of the cross.

Then perhaps, when we hold palm branches on Palm Sunday this year, we will be more open to receiving the kind of king Jesus actually came to be.

A blessed beginning of the season of Lent to you all.

**BLESSING FOR HOLY MONDAY**

May the path that Christ walks  
to bring justice upon the earth,  
to bring light to those who sit in darkness,  
to bring out those who live in bondage,  
to bring new things to all creation:  
may this path run through our life.  
May we be the road Christ takes.

**Jan Richardson** from *The Painted Prayerbook*  
[janrichardson.com](http://janrichardson.com)



## THE PRINCE – AN EASTER STORY

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

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

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

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

At this the young stallion and the pretty mare became quite agitated. "The Prince will want to ride into the city on my back," boasted the young stallion, his chest puffing up with pride. "There is no finer animal in the whole kingdom to carry him." "Well, I don't think so," retorted the pretty mare. "You are strong, to be sure, but my mane is braided and tasselled with fine beads and sparkling jewels. A grand Prince will need to display his riches and authority, and what better way than to enter the city on my back."

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

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

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

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

The Prince glanced politely at the pretty mare but he seemed distracted. "Are there no other animals here?" he asked the farmer. "Well none except my old donkey, Pedro, and really he's good for nothing. I only keep him because the children are fond of him." The farmer was becoming more embarrassed by the minute. The Prince went over to the corner of the barn where Pedro stood quietly munching some hay. "Hello, old fellow," he whispered. "My, what soft fur you have." He patted Pedro gently. "How about taking me into the city today?" Pedro could hardly believe his ears. The Prince wanted him, the oldest and shabbiest of all the animals in the stable, to take him into the city for the grand parade!

The other animals snorted with disgust. But Pedro was speaking. "Yes, my Lord, nothing would give me greater pleasure. It would be an honour to carry you on my back." And that is how a lowly donkey, was chosen to carry the greatest Prince of all into the city of Jerusalem and why his story will never be forgotten. © **Anne O'Connor**

## DIARY

### MARCH

**6 World Day of Prayer** A women-led, global, ecumenical, movement. This year the service has been prepared by Christian Women from Nigeria on the theme, "I will give you rest, come". Look out for a service in your area.

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

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

**8 'Towards an Unarmed and Disarming Peace' – What does this mean for Women of Faith today?**

7:00 pm – 8:30 pm An online roundtable discussion to celebrate International Women's Day with:

Sr Katrina Alton, Pax Christi National Chaplain, Siobhan Burke, Tutor, St Bede's Pastoral Centre, York, Christabel McCooney, Barrister and Judge, Sr Maryanne Francalanza FCJ, Director of the Centre for Spirituality and Ecojustice. Register here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/22Qt5xztTaUlw9Z4bPSSA#/registration>

**9 Christian Aid Lunch** 12 noon – 1.30 pm Wesley Methodist Church St. John Street Chester CH1 1DA (catered by St Werburgh's & City Road Presbyterian church)

**12 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](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)

**14 Chester Fairtrading Spring Fair** at the Wesley Church Centre Chester CH1 1DA 11am-3pm. Help support global fair trading – Zaytoun Palestinian products, Divine chocolate, Chifundo textile products.

**14-16 PAX CHRISTI SPEAKING TOUR** <https://paxchristi.org.uk/event/save-the-date-nonviolence-speaking-tour/>

**14 London: 'Nonviolence: A Radically Different Response to our Violent World'** A day of presentations, discussion and reflection with Nicholas Paz, Director of the Pax Christi International Nonviolence Initiative. 10:30 am – 4:00 pm Aula Magna, London Jesuit Centre 114 Mount Street London W1K 3AH Free event - reserve a place here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/nonviolence-a-radically-different-response-to-our-violent-world-tickets-1980722535423?aff=oddtcreator>

**15 Leeds: 'Nonviolent Approaches to Conflict'** A practical workshop with Nicholas Paz, Director of the Pax Christi International Nonviolence Initiative. 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm Quaker Meeting House 188 Woodhouse Lane Leeds LS2 9DX [https://paxchristi.org.uk/event/save-the-date-nonviolence-speaking-tour-leeds/?instance\\_id=1570](https://paxchristi.org.uk/event/save-the-date-nonviolence-speaking-tour-leeds/?instance_id=1570) Fee £10 Bursaries are available. Please contact us on [info@paxchristi.org.uk](mailto:info@paxchristi.org.uk) if you need a bursary in order to attend. Numbers limited – book here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/nonviolent-approaches-to-conflict-tickets-1980457583946>

**16 Just Peace or Just War? Nonviolence – a radical approach in our troubled world** - an interactive workshop for 16 – 18 year-olds (and particularly Sixth Form and RE students) with Nicholas Paz, Director of the Pax Christi Catholic Nonviolence Initiative starting at 1:15 pm Bellerive FCJ Catholic College 1 Aigburth Drive Sefton Park L17 3AA Contact: Jennifer Rowlands for further information on 0151 727 2064

**16 Liverpool: 'Nonviolence: A Radical Response to our Violent World'** Nicholas Paz, Director of the Pax Christi International Nonviolence Initiative. 6.30pm Quaker Meeting House, 22, School Lane Liverpool L1 3BT. All welcome (drinks available from 6.00pm, bring sandwiches) Local contact Jan Harper 07591082195 email [janharper20211@outlook.com](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com) see <http://www.paxchristi.org.uk> and <https://paxchristi.org.uk/event/save-the-date-nonviolence-speaking-tour-liverpool/>

**18 Global Recycling Day** – a day for the world to come together and put the planet first.

<https://www.globalrecyclingday.com/>

**19 Chester People Planet Pint** at That Beer Place 116 Foregate Street Chester CH1 1HB 7-9 pm. Pop down to your local People Planet Pint meetup to find more about what's going on locally with sustainability and how you can get involved. <https://ecocommunitiesuk.com/event/chester-people-planet-pint-9/> Book via Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/chester-small99s-people-planet-pinttm-sustainability-meetup-tickets-1615983653609?aff=oddtcreator>

**20 Christian Aid Lent Lunch** 12 – 1.30 pm Hoole URC, Hoole Road, Chester, CH2 3NT

**21** <https://www.fao.org/international-day-of-forests/>

**24 Feast Day of St. Oscar Romero** <https://www.romerotrue.org.uk/>

**28 Hoole Green Festival in Chester** Celebrate sustainability, community and local creativity. The event brings the community together for a fun, family-friendly day focused on greener living, with stalls, activities and plenty of inspiration for making everyday life more eco-friendly. The free event will include talks and demonstrations exploring sustainability and positive change, as well as stalls selling locally sourced, low-waste food.

**29 Tattenhall Repair Café 10-12 in the Barbour Institute, Tattenhall.** Last Sunday of every month (except December). A repair café is a great way to stop waste, reduce consumption, and build community links. For simple repairs on generally low value equipment where a professional repair is not needed- broken chair leg, ripped cushion, broken kettle lid, darning, clothes mending etc. <https://www.transitiontattenhall.co.uk/projectrepaircafe>

### APRIL

**9 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](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)

**25 NJPN Day in Sheffield** 'Shining the light on Food and the Environment' Contact: [admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk](mailto:admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk)

## MAY

**1-3/4 Craft Weekend** Boarbank Hall, Grange-over-sands, Cumbria. For more information or booking, email [margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk](mailto:margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk). Website: [www.boarbankhall.org.uk](http://www.boarbankhall.org.uk)  
**9-14/16 Two Wings and Some Prayers** Boarbank Hall, Grange-over-sands, Cumbria (see above for info)  
**10-16 Christian Aid Week** <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week>  
**14 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](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)  
**16 NJPN 'Shining the light in an All Night Vigil' online.** Contact: [admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk](mailto:admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk)

**JULY 24-26th 'Just Talk' NJPN Conference at Swanwick** NB Bookings after May 15th incur booking surcharge <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/>

- 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](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://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-north-west/spring-mouthpeace-2026/>

- 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 article

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

## **JULY 24 -26 JUST TALK 48TH ANNUAL NJPN CONFERENCE at The Hayes Conference Centre Swanwick Derbyshire DE55 1AU**

Words do matter, the language we use reflects our attitude and our ignorance. With negative language around racism, refugees, asylum seekers and many 'others', reinforcing stereotypes, what do we hear and to whom do we listen? Who decides what makes the headlines as media platforms seek to influence opinion and behaviour?

Our 2024 conference considered what would a 'Just Politics' look like and how might this be achieved. We were challenged to work for change in our society, building relationships within and across communities, empowering groups and individuals to engage with the political process, highlighting our hopes, dreams and needs, in line with Catholic Social Teaching.

In 2025 we were reminded that a 'Just Peace' demands more than the absence of war; it insists on justice, dignity, and inclusion for all and, as people of faith, we were offered an alternative model, built through deep listening, courageous dialogue and collective action rooted in love, committing to a radical hope that serves the common good. A constant thread running throughout these conferences was that we grow as individuals and communities only through the kinds of relationships that we build with each other and our world. We were asked to listen deeply, to respond, to disagree respectfully, to engage in difficult conversations and were challenged to create a culture of encounter.

Conference 2026 'Just Talk' will focus on dialogue and relationship building, initiating these difficult conversations and how they can be used to build up justice, peace and human dignity, rather than to dehumanise and divide, inflame tensions and stoke conflict. In a world of disinformation, sound bites and echo chambers, the conference will explore how we promote genuine communication and encounter through areas such as the media, arts, education, diplomacy and political engagement led always by the Spirit of Truth.

In celebrating 60 years of *Nostra Aetate* Pope Leo XIV said the document "opened our eyes to a simple yet profound principle: dialogue is not a tactic or a tool, but it's a way of life – a journey of the heart that transforms everyone involved, the one who listens and the one who speaks." (*Walking Together in Hope*: 28 October 2025)

**Anne Peacey** Chair NJPN (taken from NJPN Spring Newsletter)

**Read the Spring Newsletter:** <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/newsletters/spring-2026-njpn-newsletter/>  
**Bookings for the Conference:**

<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference-2026/njpn-2026-conference-booking-details/>

NB Bookings made after Friday May 15th incur a £20 late booking charge

# GOOD FRIDAY EVENING PRAYERS AROUND THE CROSS

## INTRODUCTION

We are coming to the end of our Lenten journey. This evening we set aside time to watch and wait together as we sit in quiet prayer and reflection around the cross.

## THE CROSS IS A SIGN OF LOVE

Today, in faith, we have accompanied Jesus as he takes the final steps of his earthly journey, the steps that lead to Calvary. We have heard the cries of the crowd, the words of condemnation, the insults of the soldiers, the lamentation of the Virgin Mary and of the women. Now we are immersed in the silence of this night, in the silence of the cross.

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 us, 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.

**Pope Benedict XVI** Good Friday, The Colosseum 2011

*pause for silent prayer and reflection*

**MUSIC: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* The Northumbria Community**  
from *Waymarks (Songs for the Journey)*

## REFLECTION: STILL

All too quickly the breaking of the bread becomes the breaking of the flesh. All too soon the cup offered at the table becomes the life poured out at the cross. After the rending, after the emptying: an impossible stillness, an aching silence, an incomprehensible hollow for which no word will ever be adequate. And now? How will we meet this silence? What will we do with this ache?

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

*pause for silent prayer and reflection*

## STILL: A BLESSING FOR GOOD FRIDAY

This day  
let all stand still  
in silence,  
in sorrow.

Sun and moon  
be still.

Earth  
be still.

Still  
the waters.

Still  
the wind.

Let the ground  
gape in stunned  
lamentation.

Let it weep  
as it receives  
what it thinks  
it will not  
give up.

Let it groan  
as it gathers  
the One  
who was thought  
forever stilled.

Time  
be still.

Watch  
and wait.

Still.

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



## FINDING TRUE FREEDOM

Following Jesus is the way to enter into the struggle of surrendering to God's love to 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. He held on to nothing; there was nothing was 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** *The Road to Daybreak*

*pause for silent prayer and reflection*

## PRAYER

*The reader will pause after each line to allow ample space for us to reflect and pray silently for our own intentions:*

I come to you, Lord, with the story of my life,  
I come to you, Lord, with all my cares,  
I come to you, Lord, with all my frailty and shortcomings,  
I come to you, Lord, with all my fears,  
I come to you, Lord, with complete trust in your love for me,  
I come to you, Lord.

**Pope Francis** *Stations of the Cross 2024*

*pause for silent prayer and reflection*

## CHANT: JESUS, REMEMBER ME

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your Kingdom  
Jesus, remember me, when you come into your Kingdom

**Jacques Berthier, Taizé**

*pause for silent prayer and reflection*

## POEM

..... "My God, my God,  
why have you forsaken me?"  
The cry tears through the sky—  
the voice of the godless heard by God.  
Here is the Crucified God,  
entering the world's abandonment,  
bearing the silence of the forsaken.

He dies with open hands.  
The breath leaves him.  
The temple curtain tears.  
Even the stones seem to grieve....

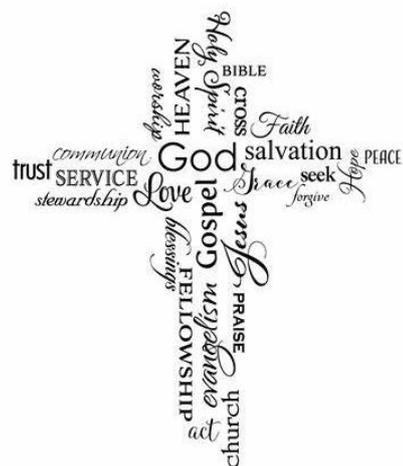
..... Now silence thickens.  
The darkest day deepens into night.  
It appears that death has spoken the last word.  
Violence seems to win.  
Hope lies still,  
buried beneath the weight of stone.

I sit with the creed in that silence—  
with the forsaken and the crucified of history:  
the oppressed, the imprisoned,  
the mocked, the spat upon,  
the ones left in the cold shadows of power.

So I believe—  
not with answers,  
but with wounds.  
I believe in the Crucified God,  
in love that drips and endures,  
in mercy that refuses to turn away.

**Rev'd Jon Swales**

from *Passus sub Pontio Pilato, Crucifixus, Mortuus, et Sepultus*  
(Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried)



## **WE BELIEVE**

*A creed composed by two boys from a Confirmation Group*

**Let us say together:**

We believe

in God  
who made the sun and the sky,  
the stars and the sea;  
who calls us to live responsibly.

We believe

in Jesus Christ  
who became human;  
who healed the sick;  
who talked to children;  
who made friends with sinners.

He burned brightly and offended many.  
His journey was one of life and death and resurrection.  
His light continues to shine in the darkness.

We believe

in the Holy Spirit  
who inspired the scriptures  
and whose breath we breathe.

We believe

that God calls us to be a community,  
committed to one another:  
offering a welcome to everyone;  
old and young; rich and poor; strong and weak.

We believe

that God calls us to be peacemakers;  
workers for justice;  
sisters and brothers;  
a light for our world.  
Amen.

*pause for silent prayer and reflection*

## **BE SOWERS OF HOPE**

The Way of the Cross ... is the way of hope,  
the way of the future.

Those who take up this way with generosity and faith  
give hope and a future to humanity.

And I would like you to be sowers of hope.

**Pope Francis** World Youth Day, Krakow 2016

*pause for silent prayer and reflection*

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

**Let us say together:**

Watch now, dear Lord,

with those who wake or watch or weep tonight;  
and give your angels charge over those who sleep.

Tend your wounded ones, O Christ;  
rest your weary ones, bless your dying ones,  
soothe your suffering ones, shield your joyous ones  
and all for your love's sake.

Amen.

**St Augustine**