

NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin September 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

JUST TALK - NATIONAL JUSTICE & PEACE CONFERENCE

Joan Sharples Aug 5, 2026

'Dialogue is not a tactic or 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.'

These words of Pope Leo XIV, on display in the Prayer Room, encapsulate my experience of this year's National Justice and Peace Conference, 'Just Talk', which invited its participants into a process of 'deep and patient listening: reflection; and response'.

When asked, in the opening session, 'What breaks your heart in the world today?', there was no shortage of answers. People shared their pain at the divisions in our world; the unfair distribution of wealth; the dehumanisation of immigrants and other minorities; the rapid growth of AI; the lack of public space to allow protest to be heard...

Brian O'Toole, Director of the Presentation Interprovincial Justice Desk, articulated the lack of confidence felt by many in holding difficult conversations with those who have different opinions; whether that be across the Christmas dinner table or across political, cultural and social divides.

In the remainder of the weekend, speakers told stories - good news stories - of relationships that had crossed boundaries, that had, in Liz Archibald's phrase 'mixed up the wrong people'. Liz described how concern over a detention centre brought together people from different faith communities.

Two young men from Northern Ireland, from different sides of the religious divide, reflected on how their perceptions and relationships with 'the other side' had changed over the years. Chairing that session, Sir John Battle mused that their presence together as speakers on the stage at a J&P conference would have been impossible twenty years ago.

Workshops on Saturday covered a range of issues.

Fay Pretty from PeaceJam UK spoke of her work developing critical thinking with young people aged 5-30 and Michael Thompson from Tyne & Wear Citizens shared his experience of engaging fruitfully with all shades of politicians.

Brian O'Toole explored the impact of social media, fast moving news cycles, algorithms and artificial intelligence. Azan Hasan from the J&P Research project in Newcastle led a workshop on Resilience and Dialogue in Conflict Zones.

Peter McDonagh and Joselyn Taylor led a fascinating group on 'Deaf Awareness: The Beauty of God's Word in Sign Language'. They spoke about the history of Sign Language - until the 1970s people were encouraged to lip-read rather than use sign language - but in fact this does not work very well. Most Deaf people can only understand about 30 per cent through lip-reading.

There were also workshops on interfaith dialogue, militarism, racism and an OutoftheBox workshop.

Just Fair stalls in the sports hall represented 24 charities, campaign groups and religious orders - offering information and goods: books and cards - there was a chance to stock up on olive wood carvings, dates and olive oil from the Holy Land.

There was a Quiet Prayer Space and many of us explored the beautiful gardens.

After Mass on Saturday on Saturday evening - accompanied by the wonderful music group, and supper, there was a Ceilidh in the main hall accompanied by Drop of a Hat.

By the end of the conference, I felt more confident, more able to 'speak love from the heart' and take the risky step of talking to those whose views might differ to mine, finding what we share in common and making connections which might enhance relationships and bring a better world into being.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/55595>

Link - NJPN: www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/



NJPN POST CONFERENCE CATCH-UP Monday 14th September 7.30pm to 9pm (online)

Following the successful JUST TALK Conference at Swanwick in July, all are welcome to join and discuss what we heard, see what we have been doing, and generally talk about this year's event.

NJPN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Wednesday 23rd September 7.30pm to 8.30pm (online).

Whether you are a member or not, you are more than more than welcome to join. It is a good way to find out the plans, the activities and hopes for the year ahead. N.B. If anything comes to the vote, non-members will not be counted.

Booking details for these events will be sent out shortly to members.

Or for more information contact admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk

JUST TALK – KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING: IMAGES OF THE CONFERENCE

Anne O'Connor writes: *I wasn't able to attend the Conference but would recommend watching the videos (link below) to get a flavour of the conversation. Here are some images, in order, from the closing day:*

The demolition of a water tank in Palestine as a way of evicting people – people are so dependent on water. People outside parliament protesting being told to be quiet – “We're debating the protest bill on the inside.”

Elderly Quakers on a mobility scooter turning up outside a mosque not to protest but to add support at a difficult time. And then at a different time to turn up at an event on scooters because they were less able than others. But the amount of effort it took I often wonder like they would have taken more time to collaborate and team up and ring each other. “What time you go?” “Actually, we'll go together.” “How will we do that?” “Will I bring the poster?” “Will you have a sandwich?” “What can we do?” “How will we do this?” All that kind of planning. It must have taken fierce coordination, but then to have them criminalized for the effort of protesting as elderly, less mobile people. There was something prophetic about that picture that really kind of caught me.

Catholic leaders are sometimes absent shepherds. And that picture of an absent shepherd really kind of gave picture of a lost flock or not sure where to go or maybe it's a case that the flock were saying come on and we'll show you the way.

Keep the capital J in just talk.

Moving from just talk to just action - the two kind of go hand in hand.

People talking and having a one-to-one - actually we've far more in common than we have as difference.

I don't have to agree with everything this person is about or does or says but if I go out of my way to meet them I might find I'll meet the person before I meet the issue and somewhere in there is the way of building forward that whole notion of encounter, building relationships one-to-ones knowing and learning about the person that somewhere in there is growth and there is possibility and there is hope.

Security guards with carnations – it certainly disempowers or it certainly softens the notion of security guards at a detention centre if they're holding carnations.

The mural at the end of the street where there's a picture, a fantastic mural. But the slogan was just jarring. It had ‘ready for peace but prepared for war.’

Building trust across difference - meeting the person before you take on the issue and knowing the person a little bit better.

In Kosovo an Albanian man and a Serb working together to fix a power plant that wasn't working, using the skills they had in common to make things better for everyone.

All these things that happen incidentally provide often some of the best lessons, the quietest lessons.

Paul kind of smiled at the notion that a Baptist might have a good idea or maybe even a Methodist might have a good idea. I kind of smiled too. But you know, I think it was maybe the way he told it and I think the stories that we got from people were colourful and what we got was some of them and what we got was encounter. And we were beginning to realize throughout the course of the morning that actually this idea of difficult conversations often begins with encounter.

It's hard to sustain hate when you're looking people in the eye. When you see the whites of the eyes really it's very hard to maintain the position you might have done if you went away.

The hug that Liz described from the Jewish man outside the detention centre, the one she gave and the one she got and what it meant and that kind of coming together around an issue again. Again, building trust across difference.

Fay gave us that notion of the triangle, the inspiration, education and action triangle. And the image of a child of 13 or 14 maybe saying, well, I bring a knife to school.

Billy described Donegal farmers being annoyed when he told the story of how people have their land taken from them by maybe demolishing a water tank or people just moving in saying, "You're done here. Move," and he was trying to say to them, can you put yourself in their shoes?

I loved the idea that Fay had had and I thought, wow, this is a gift. Imagine having a chair at every table where there's a young person can come up and sit and when a question is asked, the young persons included can answer and then that can rotate. And the idea that when we sit we're pretty much the same height no matter how old or what age you are. So, there is a levelling in that. But that way of inclusion, I thought, well, now I think we might do something like that from then on.

I like the idea of Donna who was the worker was trying to get elected and is now a Reform councillor. And you kind of go, Donna, like what did she do that for? But then, as Mike said, well, actually, Donna is now one of our closest allies, and she's very much in tune with what we have.

We asked you what breaks your heart. We asked you also to remember that this weekend we were trying to bring to out the notion of tables, not walls. And I think very much that was embraced. And I think when you got going on talking, well, I still think you're at it.

What I also got to was we have a right to protest and that right has been eroded. And I really learned something about it coming from that tender place or the prompting of a loving heart. I thought what a great way of articulating the idea or the thought about behind protesting.

Is free speech and this question still bothers me, is free speech now just the preserve of those who hold the microphone? And that question was asked yesterday and it was a question that is it a case that those at the margins are those affected first, fastest and most are less likely to ever have the microphone and if they do get it do they just get it for a short while?

Jo spoke about messages of encouragement from the pulpit will be really, really welcome and supported and were noticed in their absence not just once but several times.

Kevin spoke about Billy's pieces being prophetic, poetic and powerful and that communication really is about being authentic and just.

And I think it was John who kind of summarized it when he said, you know, we give you the gift of our listening as service. And I thought that's a lovely way of putting it. So, we're not asking you to do someone a favour. It is a service for us to listen to you and to do with and not for.

Liz said some people are told, "Well, your country is a safe country, so I don't know what you're doing here." And Liz said, "Yeah, it might well be a safe country, but it might not be safe for that person at that time."

She also reminded us that you that all faiths speak of welcoming a stranger. So, no matter how well or not you get on or whether you've doesn't matter if all faiths speak of a welcome of a stranger there is what we will talk about - something we have together in common.

When we work together we form relationships and that friction releases a little bit of God.

The idea of bringing stories from one place to another which is essentially what happened over the weekend. We have had a great chance to hear stories to listen to story and to pass stories on to each other and that's the whole idea of the conference.

Fay mentioned three aspects: knowledge in what you know, questioning in what you want to know, and then action in what are you going to do or what would you like to happen? And she told us things like, you know, immigrants are stealing all their houses. How do you feel about that? And she showed us how to reframe it. She also told us that sometimes good people make bad decisions.

I love this quote. I think it was Barack Obama. He had it. If something needs to be done, then lace up your shoes and do something. So, in other words, take an active part in it. the antidote to anxiety is to take action. If you can be an agent in change, if you can be part of the difference.

Be curious because being curious is an invitation but not an obligation.

Joe said I've been coming for a number of years and I found this conference very inspiring partly because of its simplicity but simply profound. I mean, I'm all for powerful intellectual presentations but most of it goes over my head. Whereas on this occasion there were so many practical and simple things like, you know, what is it that breaks my heart because that says so much and it opens so many doors. So, I want to thank the organizers and her team and for all of the details and there's so many things in the background that we maybe take for granted.

We have far more in common with each other than we do that's different. For some people the conversation you have with them may be the only one they have that day.

The most important part of talking is listening, listening with intent, listening long enough for them to know you are there with intent. I don't have to change everybody. I simply have to make sure another voice is heard, even for a short period of time.

So, say: that has made me think. I can't say I agree with you. I would like to hear more. And there's a willingness to listen. Immediately something has changed. Don't challenge. "Let's look at this together." Respect the dignity of the person.

Peace grows around tables and not walls. Walls divide and keep people out. Conversations grow around tables – tables invite, they welcome, they make room for another chair.

Taken from Brian O'Toole's summary of the conference 'From Conversation to Commitment Shaping Our Shared Statement.'

Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yF92TI2HT94&list=PLBNGg35s5pdA>

JUST TALK CONFERENCE 2026 VIDEOS

Brian O'Toole - Beginning the Conversation - <https://youtu.be/iGjbWODzVO8>

Billy Vaughan - Dialogue, Freedom of Speech and the Right to Peaceful Protest - <https://youtu.be/wuKsnRGV8bs>

Billy Vaughan Dialogue, Freedom of Speech and the Right to Peaceful Protest Question and Answer - <https://youtu.be/TO-4eehxo9Q>

Sir John Battle - Listening on local practice - Encountering others (with Billy, Liz and Paul) - https://youtu.be/G6nw_cex1fY

Brian O'Toole From Conversation to Commitment Shaping Our Shared Statement - <https://youtu.be/yF92TI2HT94>

The playlist, containing all the 2026 conference videos, is available at <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBNGg35s5pdA&si=Snd4LHCGJ3Fm7qEu>

DIALOGUE, FREEDOM OF SPEECH, AND THE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL PROTEST

Why is protest part of dialogue?

Highlights from Billy Vaughan's recent talk at the National Justice & Peace Network conference.

Source Quakers in Britain - Billy Vaughan blog 3 Aug, 2026 (reproduced here by kind permission)

What do we think when we think of 'dialogue'? My work takes me into the corridors of Westminster, into parliamentary committee rooms, and alongside grassroots Quaker activists and faith communities. In our political and social landscape today, talk can feel remarkably cheap, but true dialogue has rarely felt more costly, more rare, or more desperately needed.

As the late Pope, Francis, observed: "We dialogue to meet each other, not to fight". Some might think that protest falls more into the 'fight' category than the 'meet'. I disagree strongly. In the Quaker tradition, seeking truth requires us to listen deeply for that of God in everyone, while also finding the spiritual courage to speak truth to power from a place of love.

When people hear the phrase 'freedom of speech', they often picture a podium, a television debate, or a parliamentary chamber. When they hear 'dialogue', they picture two people sitting in a quiet room, drinking tea, exchanging viewpoints.

I want to broaden our definition.

Protest is not the opposite of dialogue. Protest is what happens when official, and some might say 'polite', channels of dialogue have failed, closed their doors, or refused to listen. It is a community saying to the powerful: "We are still here. We have something vital to tell you. Listen to us."

To understand why this is needed, consider how these official channels actually work. When a government launches a public consultation or invites stakeholder feedback, who gets heard? It is often the well-resourced interests, the established PR firms, and those who already have direct access to ministers. The marginalised, the powerless, and those whose lives are directly impacted by policy are rarely given a voice.

Public protest is the democratisation of dialogue. It is how ordinary citizens, without lobbying budgets or media control, refuse to be rendered invisible. It is how a community transforms a private grievance into a public, inescapable moral question.

The legal landscape

Why is this so urgent in 2026? Three legislative changes have systematically eroded space for public dissent:

- **The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022** introduced severe restrictions on public gatherings based on noise and disruption.
- **The Public Order Act 2023** criminalised long-standing nonviolent tactics like "locking on" and lowered the threshold for police intervention.
- **The Crime and Policing Act 2026** introduced provisions to limit "*cumulative disruption*", granting authorities powers to restrict recurring peaceful demonstrations in the same area.

These laws were passed by both Conservative and Labour governments. Unfortunately, there is a political consensus on restrictions on protest.

This is supported by a false dichotomy pitting 'free speech' against 'protest'. Free speech is painted as intellectual and polite, while protest is framed as disruptive noise.

I reject this division. Protest *is* speech. It is the ultimate embodiment of free speech. Without protest, 'freedom of speech' becomes an empty gesture and a privilege reserved only for those who already hold the microphone.

Protest as dialogue

Recently, our Recording Clerk Paul Parker said to Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights: "It is an imperative of Quaker faith that we listen in our silent meetings for worship for the will of God, and seek to follow it in our words and actions. That has meant that, since the 17th century, Quakers have been led by faith to bear witness and take action against unjust laws and practices. It is rooted in love and compassion. What we think we are seeing at the moment is the state seeking to interfere in individuals' ability to follow the promptings of love in their hearts as part of their faith."

Paul was also able to share testimony from many Quakers: ordinary people such as teachers, healthcare workers, students, and elderly pensioners, who face criminalisation or intimidation simply for standing in public and holding a placard. Many more have stayed away from public protests altogether, for fear of losing professional licences needed for their livelihood; others had caring responsibilities and were worried about what would happen to their loved ones if they went to prison.

These are people who have been prevented from living out their faith, which calls them to show the promptings of love in their hearts. Reading these testimonies made me extremely sad, and extremely angry. One silver lining is that we were able to bring them directly to the lawmakers who were and are responsible. The stories show that current laws are eroding trust in a rights-based civil society and directly affecting people's right to practice their faith publicly.

Genuine dialogue

If we want to build a culture of genuine dialogue, we must defend the right of people to speak in ways that challenge the status quo.

Quakers do not defend protest because we agree with every single tactic or slogan. We defend protest because a society that criminalises nonviolent dissent is a society that has given up on dialogue altogether.

When we stand peacefully in the street, when we hold a candle in vigil, or when we raise our voices for justice, we are not breaking the dialogue. We are bringing it to those who need to hear it most.

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/dialogue-freedom-of-speech-and-the-right-to-peaceful-protest>

• **Billy Vaughan** works on political advocacy in areas such as protest rights, truth & integrity in Westminster, and faith-led responses to the far-right.

MARKING 5 YEARS OF INTERFAITH PRAYER VIGILS

Liz Archibald, a panellist at the Just Talk Conference, shared her experience of taking part in a monthly interfaith prayer vigil outside an immigration removal centre in the North East. Here she gives some background to the vigils:

In August, we marked an anniversary which we wished wasn't happening. It was five years since our interfaith prayer vigils at the barrier to Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre started.

The Centre, based in Medomsley near Consett, Co Durham opened in late 2021. It is an Immigration Removal Centre for women who are seeking asylum. It is one of a network of Immigration Removal Centres operated by the Home Office. It can house up to 80 women. Many people are there for only a short time before being moved elsewhere, some will be released on bail, some will be freed, some will be deported and some will be there much longer.

The women are under threat of deportation. We believe that there are more humane and dignified ways to treat the detained women than having them locked up in a prison-like environment. Often the women have no idea as to when they could be deported or how long they will be held, and this uncertainty only increases their sense of fragility and distress.

There are alternatives to detention which you can read about here:

<https://detentionaction.org.uk/about-detention/alternatives-to-detention>

On learning of the plans to open the Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre, members of the Justice and Peace Coordinating Council in the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle strongly opposed the action.

Realising early on that welcoming the stranger is a common theme in all the world's major faiths, we invited members of other faith communities to form a working group.

It was decided to meet monthly to pray for the women held in detention and to give a sign of witness and solidarity. We have been meeting on the first Sunday of each month since August 2021 at the barrier to Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre. At the time the vigils started the building was still being constructed.

The Vigils take place at the barrier to the Centre at 3.00pm on the first Sunday of each month. There is a short prayer service of about 45 minutes which includes readings from a variety of inter faith sources, prayers, poems and a powerful time of silence. The silence is broken by a group of people from the Jewish faith who offer a lamentation, sung in Hebrew. There is something very powerful about hearing that lamentation; a sense of connection with oppressed people who throughout the centuries have prayed it .

The vigils are led by different members of the group on a rota basis. On average about 30 people are in attendance from various Christian denominations and members of the Jewish Faith as well as people of no Faith who appreciate the witness. We encourage people who cannot attend in person to pray from home.

Through the organisation Friendship Across Borders, we are able to provide toiletries and other gifts which are made into packs and given to the women who have very little or no access to financial support. We also provide money for phone cards. Each month, we have permission to hand over 3 bunches of flowers for the women's communal areas as a sign of our love and care for them.

We also encourage participants to write to their MPs about asylum issues and law and share relevant links and documents to keep people informed about the wider issues around asylum.

Through our consistent monthly presence in prayer at the barrier, we hope to respond to the words of Pope Leo who has spoken about the "globalization of indifference" in which we risk "becoming immobile, silent, and perhaps sad, thinking that nothing can be done in the face of innocent suffering."

Mary Hughes, Liz Archibald, Members of the interfaith prayer vigils at Derwentside IRC

Useful websites for more information about asylum issues

Refugee Council <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

Migration Observatory <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/>

VIGIL PRAYERS

Thanks to Liz for supplying a selection of readings from the Derwentside vigil and photos of the group, including members of the Jewish faith who offer a lamentation, sung in Hebrew.

VIGIL DERWENTSIDE IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRE

Every first Sunday of the month at 3 pm

GATHERING PRAYER

We gather here as people of faith, and in love and compassion for the women/men who are detained here,
We gather together, assured that our God is here among us.
We come together in solidarity with those who are detained here, remembering members of their families from whom they are separated. We gather knowing our need of God, asking for open hearts and minds.
In this time of Vigil, bless each one of us and all who are detained beyond this barrier. Lord help us always "to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly" with you and with each other.
In God's name we gather. Amen.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.

Saint Augustine

SCRIPTURE

"This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God."

Micah 6:8

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

Leviticus 19:33-34

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Matthew 25:35-36

"For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping his one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Galatians 5: 14

"And do not forget to do good and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

Hebrews 13:16



PRAYERS

We pray for all those who are detained indefinitely in immigration removal centres. We ask that they might feel your presence close to them during the difficult moments of isolation. We ask that they may know they are not forgotten.

We also pray for those who have been released, for those who have recently left detention and are still affected by their experience. May they be given your consolation as they return and readjust to life outside the centres.

Lord, give us courage to accompany others, for in walking at their side, we find You here present with us. Give us joy that we might serve others, for in showing our compassion to those who suffer, we sense your healing grace at work in us. Give us wisdom as we advocate for others, for in defending the downtrodden, we hear your voice speak up for us.

Grant that in all we do, we may give you glory Lord; we return all we have in love for you, for you have given everything to us. Amen.

Jesuit Refugee Service

O God, open our eyes that we may see the needs of others; Open our ears that we may hear their cries; Open our hearts that we may feel their anguish and their joy.

Let us not be afraid to defend the oppressed, the poor, the powerless, because of the anger and might of the powerful. Show us where love and hope and faith are needed, and use us to bring them to those places.

Open our ears and eyes, our hearts and lives, that we may in these coming days be able to do some work of justice and peace for you. Amen.

The Sabeel Centre, Jerusalem



Spirit & Verse:

A Prayer For World Day Of Migrants And Refugees

When Abraham welcomed the angels, they, too,
were on a journey, and he begged them not to pass him by.

How is it that we miss the holy image of God
in our sisters and brothers, traveling perilous distances
in the baking sun, the drenching rain?

How is it that we do not run from our tents to welcome
and deeply embrace all who flee from violence and poverty,
seeking the ever-distant horizon of hope?

May we, like Abraham, run to gather the very best
of what we have to offer and lay it out lovingly
on the holy table of hospitality.
Amen.

@Cameron Bellm

<https://www.jesuits.org/stories/spirit-verse-a-prayer-for-world-day-of-migrants-and-refugees/>

Our Father

Our Father who art in heaven, creator of all the races
in your world, hallowed be thy name, praised and beloved
by all your people of whatever colour and race.

Thy kingdom come, where racial justice prevails and all
are welcome without favour or discrimination.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,
where we will strive to live as sisters and brothers
bound together as your children.

Give us this day a day of enlightenment
when we recognise all peoples as equal in your sight,
our daily bread to share with our neighbours
of whatever colour, race or creed.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who
trespass against us.

Forgive the wrongs of the colonial past, the oppression
of slavery, the assumption of white privilege
and the ongoing racism hidden in ourselves and
our communities.

Lead us not into temptation, of pride and the denial
of truth, but deliver us from the evil of racism which
divides communities and destroys lives.

We pledge our active commitment to seek racial justice
and equity for everyone both individually and institutionally,

For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory
which will transform us all for ever and ever.
Amen.

National Board of Catholic Women



INTERCESSIONS

Response:

Oh Lord hear my prayer (2x) When I call, answer me.
Oh Lord hear my prayer (2x) Come and listen to me.

INTRODUCTION TO 15 MINUTES OF SILENCE

In silence we hear God's whisper,
Moving like a feather through our being.
Stroking and transforming timid souls,
Into fiery passion for justice.

Edwina Gateley, A Mystical Heart

CLOSING PRAYER

May we journey through our days with a lifting heart,
gifted and blessed
May we work in a spirit of collaboration, support
and compassion.
And may God, be in our beginnings and endings,
and on the journey in between.
Amen.

SIGN OF PEACE

Let us stretch both our hands towards the detention
centre and send a sign of peace to people detained
there and people working there.

And then let us offer peace to one another and to the
world we live in.



CATHOLIC PRIESTS WRITE TO PM URGING HIS GOVERNMENT TO TAKE DECISIVE ACTION ON PALESTINE

Aug 19, 2026 Source: Priests Against Genocide UK and Ireland

A group of Catholic priests ministering across the United Kingdom and Ireland, writing on behalf of the international network Priests Against Genocide - which includes three Cardinals, 28 Bishops and more than 2,500 Catholic priests and deacons in 67 countries - has sent an open letter to Prime Minister Andy Burnham urging his government to take decisive action on Palestine.

The letter welcomes the Prime Minister's own description of events in Gaza as "a scar on our collective conscience," and acknowledges steps the government has already taken, including the partial suspension of arms licences, the pause in trade talks, and sanctions on individuals linked to settler violence. But the priests argue that, measured against what the United Nations has now formally called genocide, these measures remain insufficient.

The letter cites the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry, which concluded in June 2026 that Israeli security forces and authorities have deliberately targeted Palestinian children, amounting to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Gaza, and war crimes in the West Bank. It also notes findings from Save the Children UK that at least 265 children have been killed in Gaza since the October 2025 ceasefire, and that Palestinian children remain among the most vulnerable to death and injury from explosive weapons anywhere in the world.

Echoing calls already made by CAFOD, Save the Children UK, other aid agencies, and a cross-party letter signed by 80 MPs and Peers, the priests ask the government to take three concrete steps:

Recognise the UN Commission of Inquiry's finding of genocide, and implement the International Court of Justice's ruling in full.

Ban trade with illegal Israeli settlements - as CAFOD's current petition to Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds MP asks, following the lead already taken by Spain and Ireland - and suspend the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement.

Impose a full arms embargo, including the export of British-made components for F-35 fighter jets, and introduce comprehensive sanctions against those responsible for these violations.

The letter also expresses concern that the government has so far declined to act on any of these three demands, and notes that the Foreign Secretary's first statement in office referred to "Russia's illegal war in Ukraine" while describing events in Palestine only as "conflict in the Middle East."

The priests frame their appeal not as a partisan intervention but as an expression of their vocation and of Catholic Social Teaching - a tradition they note has also shaped the Prime Minister's own political formation. While affirming their total opposition to any form of antisemitism, the signatories write that they stand ready to support "any politician from any party" who acts in line with that same teaching, and pledge to keep Mr Burnham in their prayers.

The full letter text follows:

19 August 2026
The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street, London SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

We are Catholic priests who minister in different parts of the UK. We belong to an international group called Priests Against Genocide. It is a group which includes three Cardinals, 28 Bishops and over 2,500 Catholic Priests and Deacons present in 67 countries.

We were heartened to hear you describe what is happening in Gaza as "a scar on our collective conscience."

The Bible tells us: "Mercy and truth have met each other; justice and peace have embraced. Truth has risen from the earth, and justice looks down from heaven" (Psalm 85:10-11).

We write to ask that this meeting of mercy and truth, of justice and peace, be reflected not only in your private faith but in the policy of your government.

We recognise, the steps the government has already taken: the partial suspension of arms licences, the pause in trade talks, the sanctions imposed on individuals linked to settler violence. These steps are so important.

But we write because, set against the scale of what the UN has now formally called genocide, they remain, in our judgement and that of many of your own backbenchers, insufficient.

In June 2026, the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry concluded that Israeli security forces and authorities have deliberately targeted Palestinian children, resulting in genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Gaza, and war crimes in the West Bank. Save the Children

UK reports that at least 265 children have been killed in Gaza since the October 2025 ceasefire agreement and that Palestinian children remain among the most vulnerable to death and injury from explosive weapons anywhere in the world.

You yourself said, on taking office, that the UK must "do more to put pressure on the Israeli Government." We ask that you now make good on those words. We echo the call made by CAFOD, Save the Children UK and other aid agencies, and we join the cross-party letter of 80 MPs and Peers, in asking your government to take three concrete steps:

1. Recognise the UN Commission of Inquiry's finding of genocide, and implement the International Court of Justice's ruling in full.
2. Ban trade with illegal Israeli settlements - as CAFOD's current petition to Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds MP asks, following the lead already taken by Spain and Ireland - and suspend the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement.
3. Impose a full arms embargo, including the export of British-made components for F-35 fighter jets, and introduce comprehensive sanctions against those responsible for these violations.

We were troubled to learn that the government has so far declined to act on any of these demands and the Foreign Secretary's first statement in office described, "Russia's illegal war in Ukraine" while referring to events in Gaza only as "conflict in the Middle East."

In writing to you now, our advocacy on behalf of the suffering people of Gaza is not simply a political appeal, but an expression of our vocation as priests and the Gospel call to stand alongside those whose rights and dignity have been so seriously violated by the state of Israel.

As priests we make our appeal in the context of our commitment to the Gospel and to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. It goes without saying we are totally opposed to any form of antisemitism.

We are conscious too that Catholic Social Teaching has been an important influence on your own political outlook and your vision for a just world.

Given your value system you are uniquely placed at the head of this government, to close the gap between what Britain says it stands for and what it is currently willing to do.

We stand with you, a Prime Minister who has been formed in the same Catholic Social Teaching as ourselves. This issue is something over and beyond party politics and we want to support you and any politician from any party; in everything you try to do along the lines of that same teaching.

Please be assured, we are praying for you in our churches and individually as well.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of Priest Against Genocide - UK and Ireland

Father Denis Blackledge SJ., Dorset
Father Pat Browne, London
Father Gabriel Dolan SPS, Fermanagh
Father Anton Fernandopulle, Liverpool
Father Joseph McCullough SPS, Surrey
Father Ned Wall, Greater Manchester

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/55691>

LINK: Priests Against Genocide: <https://forms.gle/WH66Tzqa6KgKzyra8> (for Catholic priests who wish to join this network)

ANGLICAN BISHOP ROSEMARIE MALLETT REFLECTS ON THE DEATH OF JASON ARDAY

Source Religion Media Centre Aug19, 2026

'I fear for a culture and a Britain that is lowering its standards – not of academic rigour but of basic human decency,' says the Bishop of Croydon, Rosemarie Mallett.

Reflecting on the death of British academic Jason Arday, The Rt Revd Dr Rosemarie Mallett, Bishop of Croydon and Acting Bishop of Southwark writes:

The Prime Minister has called for a period of reflection in the wake of the tragic and avoidable death of Jason Arday. These past days have been filled with reflection – on the culture of British academia, on culture and standards in our media, on race and truthfulness... Some of this 'reflection' has been helpful, some opportunistic and shallow – some blatantly harmful.

As a Christian leader and a person of colour, I feel compelled to respond. Still, I find myself asking what may be said most faithfully, compassionately and helpfully at this time.

For me – and for many – the circumstances of Jason's final weeks and his death have understandably prompted despair, sadness, shock and fear. I fear for all those for whom the world feels a little more unsafe and uncaring, for those struggling with oppression, with prejudice or mental health. I fear for young people who have witnessed the cruelty to which Jason was subjected – and who may now no longer dare to hope or dream of what they may be able to achieve. I fear for a culture and a Britain that is lowering its standards – not of academic rigour but of basic human decency.

It is important to recognise and name our fears. But we cannot – we must not – allow fear to rule us.

As Christians, when we feel lost and bewildered, the only thing to do is to look again to Christ, to seek his peace and his guidance. As St John reminds us, perfect love casts out fear – and we find perfect love in the person of Christ our saviour.

When we turn to Christ, we inevitably notice how he treats people and who it is that he prioritises – those who are maligned, those who are overlooked, those who have failed, those who are treated as 'nothing' by the rest of the world. The God we follow is the God who sees us for all that we are – and who loves us powerfully and wholeheartedly in the face of those truths. When we turn to Christ we receive our calling afresh, as compassion, care and mercy come into focus.

And in that turning, may we also find hope: not a shallow optimism that ignores pain, but the deep Christian hope that insists death, fear, cruelty and injustice do not have the final word. Hope is what enables us to keep loving when love is costly, to keep speaking truth when truth is contested, to rise when others would have us brought low, and to keep building communities where every person is seen, honoured and cherished as made in the image of God.

So, may we continue to reflect – to name our fears but not allow them to rule us or determine our futures. May we give thanks for Jason and for all that was good in his work and his legacy. May we continue to pray for his family and friends, for those he mentored and inspired. May we turn again and again to Christ when we feel lost – and doggedly pursue our calling to seek and to show Christ's compassion for ourselves and for one another.

<https://southwark.anglican.org/news-events/news/latest-news/bishop-rosemarie-reflects-on-death-of-jason-arday/>

Source: <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/morning-news-bulletin/religion-news-21-august-2026/>

REMEMBER A CHARITY WEEK SEPTEMBER 7-13

CAFOD APPEAL: From 7–13 September many charities invite supporters to leave a legacy in their will to benefit others. CAFOD is joining charities for Remember a Charity Week, celebrating gifts in Wills. For CAFOD, gifts fund a third of our work alongside communities facing poverty and injustice.



Could you help spread the word? Please include a notice in your parish bulletin, and consider ordering free leaflets or posters for your parish. More information here: <https://cafod.org.uk/give/leave-a-gift-in-your-will>

SEASON OF CREATION 2026 SEPTEMBER 1 – OCTOBER 4

“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Is 2:4) is the theme of Pope Leo XIV’s Message for the World Day of Prayer for Creation. This highlights the connection between armed conflict and environmental degradation. Such degradation constitutes both a serious violation of our duty to care for creation, as well as a long-term threat to the lives of hundreds of millions of people. The now widespread awareness of the impact of war on natural resources has not led to the creation of adequate institutions or to responsible decisions aimed at preventing conflicts and resolving disputes peacefully. The title — a passage in which Isaiah prophesies the transformation of weapons into agricultural tools — is an explicit invitation to prioritize development and sustainability over violence and destruction.

Following from this special day **THE SEASON OF CREATION** has developed into an extended month of ecumenical observances until Sunday October 4, The Feast of St Francis of Assisi which this year marks 800 years since he died.



The Biblical text for the Season of Creation this year is drawn from Ezekiel 47: 1-12, which portrays God’s life-giving water flowing from the temple of God. The river grows deeper and deeper restoring barren land, reviving waters, and sustaining flourishing ecosystems. The vision invites human responsibility.

Recognising ecological damage, embracing interconnectedness, we are called to immerse ourselves in the water, and actively to safeguard and work for the renewal of creation so that environmental healing and human well-being may flourish together. The symbol also encourages us to immerse ourselves in the tears of creation, that is to allow our hearts to be touched by those suffering particularly from environmental degradation, as well as the suffering of all creation. <https://seasonofcreation.org/>

Green Christian resources: <https://greenchristian.org.uk/introduction/resources/seasonal/harvest/>

WORLD WEEK FOR PEACE IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL (WWPPI) SEPTEMBER 20-26, 2026

This annual World Council of Churches event is held during the third week of September. The week is an encouragement to all of us to pray and act for all those who face the challenges of the war in Gaza and the occupation of Palestine and for all those who work for peace and justice. This year the focus is on protecting children. "Behold, children are a gift from the Lord." Psalms 127:3. Children are lost in the war or left without parents; children are traumatised and afraid. Yet they are the beloved of God and the most vulnerable in conflicts.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/world-week-for-peace-in-palestine-israel-2026-concept-note>

FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT 2026 MONDAY SEPTEMBER 21 - SUNDAY 4 OCTOBER

This year we're asking you **TO DO IT FAIR - FOR PEOPLE, FOR PLANET AND FOR FAIR PAY.**

We're calling for a new law that makes sure businesses are held responsible for unfair pay and exploitation in their supply chains. No company should profit from poverty wages or hide the real human cost behind everyday products. Too many global businesses still benefit from low pay and unsafe conditions, and voluntary promises haven't fixed it. We need rules that require every company to take responsibility for the people who grow and make their products, because fair pay shouldn't be optional. <https://action.fairtrade.org.uk/page/186243/petition/1?>

CAFOD HARVEST FAST DAY 2026 2 OCTOBER

This year the focus is on northern Zimbabwe, where drought has left communities facing severe food and water shortages. Twelve-year-old Tayla told us she often arrived at school hungry and tired after fetching water for her family. Without enough to eat and drink, she struggled to concentrate and feared she would fall behind in her studies.

<https://cafod.org.uk/fundraise/parishes/support-harvest-family-fast-day-in-your-parish>

Lancaster Diocese CAFOD Harvest Fast Day Briefing Tuesday 8 September, 7pm – 8pm (online)

Meeting ID: 898 2492 2557 Passcode: 49362

<https://cafod.zoom.us/j/89824922557?pwd=oaOyf9oIFgSfVPP3XVjZSH3uaBlfVj.1&from=addon>

Patrick Gardner CAFOD Community Participation Coordinator – Lancaster Diocese Mobile: 07920 565 454

HOMELESSNESS SUNDAY OCTOBER 4, 2026

Housing Justice holds Homelessness Sunday on the Sunday before World Day Homeless each year (October 10th this year) This year's theme is 'Community Cohesion.' See: <https://www.worldhomelessday.org/>

Our aim is to raise awareness of the issues surrounding homelessness among Churches and their congregations by asking Churches to run their own Homelessness Sunday Service, either on 4th October or on a more convenient date. Below you will find a range of resources to support you in doing this. We hope that by taking time to reflect on Homelessness Sunday, Church congregations will consider what they can do in their own community to alleviate homelessness, suffering and poverty. <https://housingjustice.org.uk/donate-or-get-involved/homelessness-sunday>

CHURCH ACTION ON POVERTY SUNDAY 2026 OCTOBER 18

The theme this year is 'A Just Church – Food, Faith and Fellowship'

On Church Action on Poverty Sunday, we give, act and pray together in our churches around the UK. We know that by doing so we can help to bring about a more just and compassionate society, where everyone can live life to the full, freed from poverty.



More than 75 churches took part during 2025. Thank you all! Could your church be involved this year?

<https://church-poverty.org.uk/food-faith-fellowship-stories/>

Sign up for resources: <https://give.church-poverty.org.uk/page/182451/subscribe/1?>

ACTION AGAINST THE FLYING OF KITES IN GAZA

Heather Kiernan writes Aug 26, 2026: "Forceful actions will be taken to put an end to this phenomenon [namely, the flying of kites]. A balloon is treated like a kite, and a kite is treated like a drone, with or without explosives." (Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz, 24 August 2026).

Yesterday, the UN harshly criticised Israel's threat to evacuate people from areas where kites, drones and balloons are launched in Gaza, lamenting "unacceptable rhetoric" coming from Israeli leaders. Kites are being launched from Gaza by children searching for their innocent childhood amid the rubble. It is not about the kite; it is about the sense of freedom, flight and hope.

For the Israelis however, it is about an overwhelming desire to control the human being, their thoughts, their life and even their sky. To me anyone who threatens a child with assassination as Defence Minister of Katz announced on Monday over a kite, is nothing but a monster.

THE KITE HAS NO PASSPORT ~Vijay Prasad

I.
*Cairo's child with a spool,
barefoot upon the burning roof,
learning the difficult grammar of wind,
how not to pull when the sky said give,
how not to give when the sky said hold.*

*The kite was cheaper than a book,
two sticks, thin paper, paste and string,
but when it rose above the wires
and the water tanks and washing lines
the child owned, for once, a piece of air.*

*Below the city sweated.
Buses coughed along the avenue.
Crows quarrelled on the parapets.
Mothers called them home to eat.
They were negotiating with heaven.*

*Kites circling, diving, climbing,
strings crossing like arguments.
Sometimes one broke free
and everyone shouted as it sailed away,
then chased it through the lanes and markets,
past bicycles and men asleep beside their shops,
because a kite without a string
belonged to whoever could catch freedom first.*

II
*Gaza's sky has another grammar:
drone, missile, helicopter, smoke;
where even a scrap of paper in the wind
can enter the vocabulary of war.*

Israel is afraid of kites.

*Imagine the power that confesses this:
a state with aircraft, tanks, satellites,
walls, watchtowers, guns and algorithms
looking upward at a child's trembling paper
and seeing an enemy.*

*The kite has no passport.
It recognises no checkpoint.
The wall instructs it to stop
and the kite, being illiterate, continues.
The kite crosses above the rubble,
above the fenced and measured earth,
above the mathematics of permitted life,
carrying nothing that can be searched
except the ancient contraband of air.*

*The generals classify the clouds.
The colonels place the wind under arrest.
The captains interrogate the string.*

*A Palestinian child holds the spool.
as long as the hand does not waver,
as long as the paper becomes a wing,
as long as the suffocated look upward,
the sky cannot be occupied
entirely.*



REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8, 2026 — WHITE POPPIES FOR PEACE

White poppies are worn every year by thousands of people across the UK and beyond. They were first produced in 1933 in the aftermath of the First World War, by members of the Co-operative Women's Guild. Many of these women had lost family and friends in the First World War. They wanted to hold on to the key message of Remembrance Day, 'never again'. **More info:** <https://www.ppu.org.uk/remembrance-white-poppies>

ART AT THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSUEM NORTH (MANCHESTER)



Every artwork at IWM North, including the iconic cascading Poppies sculpture, reflects the seismic social, cultural and political changes which have shaped our world.

Poppies, ceramic artist Paul Cummins and designer Tom Piper, 2021

The iconic hand-crafted ceramic sculptures have returned to IWM North as a brand-new artwork, *Poppies*.

Reimagined as a striking sculpture, *Poppies* cascades and pools within the unique architecture of IWM North's Air Shard, falling from a height of 30 metres and comprising over 10,000 pieces from the 2018 artworks *Poppies: Wave and Weeping Window*. They now form part of IWM's collection. In their new permanent home in Manchester, you can reconnect with the poppies as both a contemporary artwork and as a means to reflect on the way war shapes lives.

Poppies is both a contemporary artwork and a work of social history. It invites reflection on loss and reimagines the association of the poppy symbol with the human cost of war.

Poppies: Wave and Weeping Window travelled around the UK between 2014 and 2018 concluding at IWM London and IWM North. Originally part of the *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* installation, they became part of a national cultural programme to mark the First World War centenary.

The poppies were hand-crafted from clay by a team of over 300 people. Over four months volunteers installed 888,246 poppies at the Tower of London. Each sculpted flower represented a life lost from Britain and its Empire in the First World War.

Roman Halter's oil on canvas collection

Halter was born into a Jewish family, the youngest of seven children. Aged 12, he was living in Chodecz, Poland. Following the outbreak of the Second World War, he survived the Łódź ghetto, as well as slave labour in Auschwitz, Stutthof and Dresden, before escaping from a death march in 1945.

Halter found inspiration in historical religious art. The themes of mother and child, of death and of human suffering resonated with his personal experiences.

Image © Roman Halter / the artist's estate



The Crusader by Gerry Judah, 2010

Artist Gerry Judah's stunning sculpture *The Crusader* (left) is his comment on modern day wars, and it also resonates with the history of world conflict.

The towering sculpture is covered by a network of war-damaged buildings. This devastated urban landscape echoes the themes within the museum's architecture of a world shaped by conflict.

Image © Gerry Judah

LINK: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-north/art-at-iwm-north>

The Quays, Trafford Wharf Road, Manchester, M17 1TZ

Opening Times 10am to 5pm Open every day except 24 to 26 December

SEASON OF CREATION 2026 An Eco Festival of events in Macclesfield

The Churches in North East Cheshire invite you to join in this period of reflection and action to cherish and protect our environment.



EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

SEPTEMBER

1 Prayer Service 6.30 pm at Macclesfield Riverside Park. Meet at the Visitor Centre Beechwood Mews SK10 2SL

11 People's Emergency Briefing on the climate and nature crisis. **7.30 pm** Film followed by discussion All welcome
St Michael's Church Market Place SK10 1D

18 Workshop 'Calling a wounded earth home' 7.45 pm Explaining what kind of people we might need to become to live life in its fullness in a time of climate breakdown. St Alban's Parish Centre, Chester Road SK11 8DJ

18 Feeding bellies not bins! 5-9 pm Cooking with surplus food. Come along to prepare, cook and eat a shared meal made from surplus food. Booking preferred 01625 421 984 at St Michael's Church Market Place SK10 1DY

23 Laudato Si' Centre 9.15 am – 2.30 pm Visit the Diocese of Salford's eco hub for environmental learning, well-being and spirituality with a walled vegetable garden and woodlands. Transport provided.

OCTOBER

1 Apple pressing - come and have a go! 4 -7 pm Drop in at Scoop and Scales Roe Street Macclesfield SK11 6UT

4 St Francis' Feast Day 800th anniversary of his death. To close and thank God for the Season of Creation.

Refreshments afterwards. **4 pm** St Michael's Church Market Place SK10 1DY

For full daily calendar of events see the St Alban's Church website: <https://www.stalbanmacc.org.uk/season-of-creation> or contact: Bernadette Bailey justiceandpeacemacc@gmail.com

OTHER DIARY DATES

SEPTEMBER

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

14 Northern Dioceses Environmental group on Zoom 6.30 pm – a reflective evening for the Season of Creation – joint meeting with the Southern Dioceses Environment Network. To join please contact: climate.ndeg@gmail.com

24 at 3pm (UK time) Online (Zoom) Dr Anne Irfan will explore the history and politics of Palestinian displacement from 1948 to the present day, examining the evolution of the Palestinian refugee experience, the role of the international refugee system, and what it means to understand the Nakba not simply as a historical event, but as an ongoing reality. https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_EpfWW_MSRWWWtyMU88qXEg#/registration

OCTOBER

10 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

Church Action on Poverty Sunday: <https://give.church-poverty.org.uk/page/182451/subscribe/1?>

NOVEMBER

10 Northern Dioceses Environmental group meeting on Zoom 6.30 pm – Environmental Developments at Ladyewell Shrine (near Preston) with Dr Stephen Garsed. To join please contact: climate.ndeg@gmail.com

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

DECEMBER

10 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

- **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 AUTUMN issue of MOUTHPEACE** the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-north-west/autumn-mouthpeace-2026/>

- See also the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com

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