NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin November 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

LAMENT AND HOPE FOR ADVENT
Rev'd Jon Swales
Advent is a time of waiting, of living in the in-between. It's that sacred tension between what is and what we long for, between the brokenness of the world and the wholeness promised in Christ.

It's a season that asks us to live with open eyes and honest hearts, to name the pain of the present while clinging fiercely to hope. Let's be honest, there's so much pain today: creation is groaning; oceans rise; forests burn; the skies choke with smoke and the creatures of God's good earth vanish.

Human hearts are groaning too. Wars rage in places like Ukraine and Gaza, tearing apart lives and leaving scars on the land and the soul. Families are driven from their homes, children suffer in the hands of those with power and hatred.

These places of suffering are not far off – they are bound to us, their cries echoing in the heart of God. It's tempting, isn't it, to look away, to numb ourselves, to drown out the groaning with distractions or denial but Advent won't let us.

Advent calls us to see, to feel, to name what is broken.

This is a season of lament and lament is a holy word, it's an act of faith to bring the world's pain to God, trusting that God hears, God sees and God will act.

But lament doesn't need to stand alone. It walks hand in hand with hope because in this season we don't just cry out 'Come Lord Jesus', we light candles, we sing songs and we remember that He is coming, the same God who entered our world as a fragile child in Bethlehem is coming again to set all things right.

This is the hope that keeps us steady: Jesus is the light of the world, a light that shines in the darkness. He is the bread of life, satisfying the deepest hunger of our hearts. He is the blessed peacemaker, the Prince of Peace who will one day turn swords in ploughshares and tears into joy. So, we wait, not passively, not despairingly but actively.

In our waiting we resist despair and lean into the promises of God. We care for creation, even as we see it groaning. We work for justice, even when the road feels long. We make peace wherever we can, knowing that every act of faithfulness points to the Kingdom we long for.

• **Rev'd Jon Swales** is a priest, poet and climate activist. See: https://www.lighthousewestyorkshire.org.uk

Watch Jon introduce his Advent prayers on YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTXEItqramc&list=PLmqiQVXn_oPxt7IaNF-vNz3W0Gx9SfIQu&index=1

AN ADVENT INVITATION
In this season of waiting, we are invited to hold together lament and hope. We lament the harm we have done to God's world, the violence we have inflicted on the earth, and the suffering it causes. But we also proclaim the hope that God has not finished with his creation. The same Christ who came as a child in Bethlehem will come again to restore the heavens and the earth.

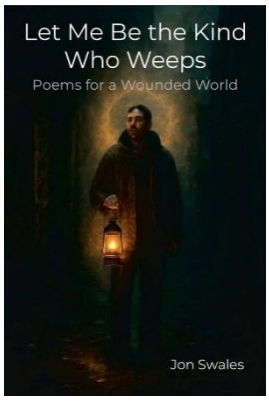
As we light the Advent candles and prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, let us also prepare our hearts and hands for the work of caring for creation. Let our worship lead us to action, our wonder to responsibility. And let us embody the love of Christ for the world he came to save.

Watch Jon's Meditation and Read the Text and Prayer:
https://www.cruciformjustice.com/post/advent-four-a-meditation-and-prayer

Download 4 Advent poems by Jon here:
Listen and Read: https://www.cruciformjustice.com/post/advent-1
Listen and Read: https://www.cruciformjustice.com/post/advent-two-a-prayer
Listen and Read: https://www.cruciformjustice.com/post/advent-3-a-prayer
Listen and Read: https://www.cruciformjustice.com/post/advent-four

BOOKS FOR ADVENT

LET ME BE THE KIND WHO WEEPS: POEMS FOR A WOUNDED WORLD



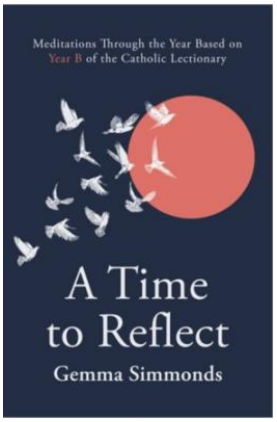
Let Me Be the Kind Who Weeps: Poems for a Wounded World by Rev'd Jon Swales MBE

"I want a gospel that holds the wound." All profits go directly to support Lighthouse, a Christian community for those battered and bruised by the storms of life.

Born from the heart of the Lighthouse community, these poems rise from the margins — from foodbanks, funerals, worship in the chaos, and the fragile beauty of grace. They are written for the weary and the wondering, for those who hold grief and faith in the same trembling hands. It's an invitation to holy realism — to lament and to love, to weep and still hope.
Price £15.https://www.lighthousewestyorkshire.org.uk/books

A TIME TO REFLECT WITH GEMMA SIMMONDS

A Time to Reflect: Meditations Through The Year Based on Year B of the Catholic Lectionary
- a new book by Dr Sr Gemma Simmonds CJ



This rich and accessible collection of reflections and prayers follows the Roman Catholic lectionary, covering Sundays and major feast days including Christmas, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, the Annunciation, Ascension, and Corpus Christi.

Each section begins with a reading from the Gospel of Mark followed by a thought -provoking meditation that draws out points of connection between all the readings for the day. A short prayer and carefully crafted questions for reflection or group discussion help readers apply Scripture to daily life.

Ideal for individuals, small groups, and worship leaders, *A Time to Reflect - Year B* offers a uniquely practical and spiritually enriching way to prepare for Sunday worship, deepen biblical understanding, and sustain a rhythm of prayer throughout the year.
Order a copy from SPCK: https://spckpublishing.co.uk/a-time-to-reflect-year-b

THE IONA COMMUNITY

HOW DO WE KEEP HOPE AND WONDER ALIVE WHEN THE WORLD FEELS DARK?



At Home in the Dark gathers daily prayers and poems from members and friends of the Iona Community for the seasons of Advent and Christmas, carrying us through the final days of the year and into Epiphany.

These are reflections for Christmas as it is actually lived: amid joy and grief, waiting and uncertainty, celebration and loneliness, a fragile planet and a world longing for peace. There is room here for candlelight and starlight, angels and shepherds, but also for food banks and refugees, protest and injustice, loss and the everyday struggles of ordinary life. Yet darkness is not the end of the story.

Again and again, these writers discover light in unexpected places: in community and compassion, in resistance and imagination, in laughter, love and the promise of new beginnings. Honest, hopeful and rooted in the realities of our world,

At Home in the Dark offers a prayer or poem for each day, inviting us not to turn away from the darkness, but to discover that even there, we are not alone.
https://www.ionabooks.com/product/at-home-in-the-dark/
ISBN: 978-1-80432-428-8 price £9.99

ADVENT REFLECTION: THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

Advent is a season of waiting. The leaves have all fallen; the weather is cold, the trees are barren. It is a good time to remember the Holy Spirit moving across the waters at the moment of creation, being breathed into Adam's inert clay, coming upon Mary in Nazareth, entering our own lives in conception and baptism. We are all called to conceive God's Child in this world; this is our vocation as Christians.

May we all find strength in the memories of those who have come before us, and in the companionship of those with us, offering us, in this time of waiting, the taste of liberation made possible in the birth of a child.

Sabra McKenzie-Hamilton from *The Catholic Worker Newsletter* December 1996

WELCOMING EMMANUEL INTO OUR HEARTS: THE GOD OF MANY NAMES

James Gordon Reid Haveloch-Jones Nov 17, 2025

As we prepare for the birth of Jesus Christ, we experience a glimpse of the divine. The language we use carries memory and mystery. This reflection explores how the God of many names will draw near to heal, dwell, and bless once again.

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14

In a season of longing and light, we are invited to name God not by tradition alone, but by encounter. As we prepare for the birth of his Son, Jesus Christ, in that encounter we experience a glimpse of the divine. For many, the language we use for the divine carries memory and mystery. This reflection explores how the God of many names will draw near to heal, dwell, and bless once again.

I often sit at Mass during the Eucharistic Prayer and hear the words, *"You never cease to gather a people to Yourself."* These liturgical words, gifted to us by the Church and echoed in both Catholic and Reformed traditions, speak to the heart of the Christian faith. They reveal God's longing to gather, bless, and dwell among His people. Early in Scripture, God tells His people: *"In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you"* (Exodus 20:24). In Jeremiah, we hear: *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you"* (Jeremiah 31:3). And in John's Gospel, we learn that if we long to meet the living God in the person of Jesus, He will send His Holy Spirit—to dwell in our hearts. Through this mutual indwelling, we are led into all truth, and *"you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32).

Yet for many, especially those whose early relationships with fathers were distant—or whose marriages and sexual experiences have left them wounded by men who abused power—the name "Father" evokes a difficult image. It may feel alien, even painful, and in no sense reflect the God who longs to inscribe deep Shalom upon our hearts: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid"* (John 14:27). I once spoke to a woman who had lost her father. She told me she could not give herself wholeheartedly to her heavenly Father, because her earthly father had been so good to her—and she feared it would tarnish his memory. Her honesty revealed something sacred: that naming God is not merely theological, but deeply personal. It touches memory, longing, and grief.

For these reasons, let us journey with Jesus back to the authentic sound of evoking the divine. Let us hear His words afresh this Advent. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus invites us to pray to Abba; a word spoken in Aramaic, intimate and tender, meaning "Papa" or "Dear One." *"Abba, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come"* (Luke 11:2). It draws us away from distorted portrayals and toward the God known by Jesus—the One we encounter through the Holy Spirit.

The God who is Abba longs to meet you with intimacy and tenderness, to heal your brokenness, to sit with you in pain, and to contend with you in suffering. Like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, Abba draws alongside you, walks with you, and whispers that you are beloved. The words spoken to Jesus: *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"* (Mark 1:11)—are a gift to you as well. And so are the words of Isaiah: *"I have called you by name, you are mine"* (Isaiah 43:1). This is the God of many names. And this Advent, Emmanuel—God with Us—comes not to impose a title, but to offer presence. And so we come to Advent—not merely as a season of candles and carols, but as a sacred invitation to reimagine how we name and know God. Emmanuel does not demand perfect theology or unblemished memory. He comes gently, as a child, into the fragile rooms of our hearts.

For those whose experience of "father" is marked by absence, betrayal, or grief, Emmanuel does not insist on a title that wounds. Instead, He whispers the name that He Himself used—Abba. Not a distant patriarch, but a presence of tenderness that embraces the maternal dimension of the divine. Not a judge behind the veil, but a companion in the garden. Abba is the God who walks with us in the cool of the day. The One who kneels beside us in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36), who weeps at gravesides, who breaks bread with us on the road to Emmaus. Abba is not a concept to be grasped, but a presence to be received.

Our God is the God of many names. El Shaddai—God Almighty—who appeared to Abraham and said, *"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless"* (Genesis 17:1). Ruach—the Spirit of God—who hovered over the waters at creation: *"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters"* (Genesis 1:2). The Spirit who is feminine in the Hebrew, neutral in the Greek and male in the Latin. Adonai—the Lord and Master—to whom Abram cried, "*O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless…"* (Genesis 15:2). Abba—the One who stays, who speaks through the Spirit of adoption: *"God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"* (Galatians 4:6). And Emmanuel—God with Us—not just in liturgy, but in longing and life!

So let us welcome Emmanuel—not with certainty, but with surrender. Not with perfect words, but with open hearts. Let us name God not by tradition alone, but by encounter. Let us say Abba—not because we must, but because we may. For the God of many names is not waiting to be understood but longing to be received, speaking through tears and tenderness, dwelling in the ache and joy, and whispering still: *"You are mine, the Beloved."*

This Advent, may Emmanuel come not just to the manger, but to the memory, the wound, the longing. May we be drawn—ever drawn—into the heart of God, who gathers, blesses, and dwells among us. This reflection is offered to all those who struggle to name God, and in that struggle, pray Ma-ra-na-tha: Come, Lord. Come… and indeed Emmanuel, God tenderly with us, will come…
https://www.godwhospeaks.uk/emmanuel-the-god-of-many-names/

• **James Gordon Reid Haveloch-Jones** is a British educator, mentor and contracted writer for *God Who Speaks* (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales) where this article was first published.

ADVENT REFLECTION: WATCHING AND WAITING
Advent is about two comings. It's about waiting and watching for the coming of the Christ child – new life, new birth, new hope coming into our world and into our lives. It is the fulfilment of God's promises. But it's also about waiting and watching for the end times when the fullness of God's kingdom will be revealed. Both these advents signify the coming together of humanity and divinity.

Advent is a time when the Church stands up in the face of the busyness of life and asks us to slow down, be still, and be quiet. We are to keep awake, looking and listening for the God who is always coming to us. We are called to prepare the way of the Lord. We watch and reflect on who we are. We look for the Christ in unexpected places – in the stuff of everyday life, in the poor, the hungry, and the needy. We live with expectancy and anticipation of God's presence in our lives. We wait for the angelic messenger that promises us that the womb of our humanity will bear a child named Jesus.

Advent reminds us that waiting and watching are holy work. So how do we do this? Silence is the key. Silence is a way of waiting, a way of watching, and a way of listening to what is going on within and around us. We come to self-knowledge through stillness and silence, through attentiveness and watchfulness.

©Michael K Marsh *Interrupting the Silence*

THE IN-BETWEEN TIMES
Advent is about the in-between times and Advent is where God will meet us. We have on one hand, a world in disarray and it doesn't seem like there is much hope. On the other hand, we have a vision of something better.

That's the struggle of Advent. A new born baby in a stable announcing: '*Peace on earth'* or a man on a cross crying: '*Forgive them, Father*'.

It is a bridge. The Jesus who does not solve all the problems or remove all the pain and suffering, but who says that fear can be met with faith and that history and hope do rhyme.

Source unknown

GOD OF HOPE
God of reconciliation and grace, you promise us a world where all is new, where love is born when hope is gone, where broken relationships are restored to wholeness.

May we live as people who know your story of love, and have the vision to imagine what could be possible if we dared to live this story.

God of abundant life, may we be witnesses of love, hope and peace, and co-creators of your life in the world. Amen.

Christian Aid

AN ADVENT POEM
If you want,
the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the holy and say,
" I need shelter for the night,
please take me inside your heart,
my time is so close."

Then, under the roof of your soul,
you will witness the sublime intimacy,
the divine, the Christ,
taking birth forever,
as she grasps your hand for help,
for each of us is the midwife of God,
each of us.

Yes there, under the dome of our being
does creation come into existence eternally,
through your womb, dear pilgrim
– the sacred womb of your soul,
as God grasps our arms for help:
for each of us is his beloved servant, never far.

If you want, the Virgin will come
walking down the street
pregnant with light and sing.

St John of the Cross

SISTERS COMMENT ON US BISHOPS PRE-ELECTION PHOTO WITH TRUMP
Oct 25, 2026**:** The Sisters of Charity of New York have published the following comment on Instagram, in response to reports about the 12 Catholic bishops who posed for a picture praying over President Donald Trump on Saturday morning.

Twelve Catholic bishops gathered in the Oval Office to pray over President Trump, just days before the midterm elections. One bishop explained that the gathering was not political. They were simply following Scripture's call to pray for those in authority. And indeed, we are called to pray for our leaders. But we are also called to speak truth to them.

What's most troubling is not that these bishops prayed for the president. It is what appears to have been missing from their public witness. Where was the concern for the poor? For immigrant families being torn apart? For those suffering beneath the violence of war? For the marginalized whose dignity is threatened? For Christianity being distorted into an instrument of political power? These are not partisan concerns. They are Gospel concerns.

We cannot know everything said behind closed doors. But we know what the world was shown. A president surrounded by bishops. Hands extended in blessing. An image shared in the final days before an election. Images carry messages. Silence carries messages, too.

For more than two centuries, women religious have served the Church without the institutional power granted to its hierarchy. We founded schools and hospitals. Welcomed immigrants. Cared for the sick and dying. Stood beside those society abandoned. And when conscience demanded it, challenged the very institutions to which we belonged. Not because we occupied the highest places in the Church. But because the Gospel demanded it.

Moral authority is not measured by how close we stand to power, but by how faithfully we stand with those who have none. The Church does not need more photographs of religious leaders standing beside the powerful. It needs more courageous witnesses standing beside the powerless.

The hierarchy gave women religious little institutional authority. History gave us something greater: moral authority. And that authority comes with a responsibility: To speak when silence would be easier. To stand where love demands. And to remember that our first allegiance is not to a president, a political party, or even an institution. It is to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
LINK: Sisters of Charity of New York: https://scny.org/
https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/56159

WESTMINSTER: ELLEN TEAGUE RECEIVES RECOGNITION OF SERVICE AWARD
Pat Gaffney Oct 27, 2026**:** Ellen Teague, well known for her work with Independent Catholic News, The Tablet and many other journals and organisations, has been given the Recognition of Service Award from the Diocese of Westminster.

The Award, a medal and a certificate, were presented by Bishop James Curry on behalf of Archbishop Moth on Thursday 22 October. Bishop Curry explained that this is offered to acknowledge Ellen's involvement and contribution to the parish of St Joseph's Wealdstone and the wider Catholic community for more than four decades.

It states: 'The Diocese recognises her involvement and contribution in the work of peace, justice and humanitarian progress. She has dedicated her life to uplifting vulnerable communities across both the United Kingdom and internationally. Her contribution stretches across the entire landscape of international development education and faith based media in the UK. Her lifetime of quiet, fierce and unceasing labour has left an immeasurable footprint on our world.

'At Diocesan level this has included being instrumental, with her husband Gerry Teague, in setting up the North London Justice and Peace Network, their parish Justice and Peace Group and coordinating the folk and children's Mass in their parish. With Bishop John Arnold, Ellen established the first Diocesan Environmental group and has for years played a role in supporting liturgy for the Westminster HCPT pilgrimage to Lourdes.

'At national and international level, Ellen has worked for CAFOD and the Columban Faith & Justice network and volunteered in Nigeria with the Volunteer Missionary Movement. As a journalist, Ellen has ensured that issues of poverty, war & peace and care of creation have featured in The Tablet, Independent Catholic News, the Columban Vocation for Justice, Redemptorist Publications and the International Messenger of St Anthony. She has served for many years, in a variety of ways, the work Pax Christi, Catholic Peoples' Weeks, Christians Aware and the National Justice and Peace Network. https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/56172

STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS: RETHINKING CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION
Rachel Arnold Oct 2, 2026 ***Grace +Truth*** **Guest writer**

"*Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it*."
Jeremiah 6:16

Something remarkable has happened in Britain over the past generation. Across the country, Christians have responded to poverty with an extraordinary growth in social action. Food banks, debt centres, night shelters, housing projects, employment programmes and countless local initiatives have become part of the fabric of our communities. Thank God for the people who show up, week after week. Without them, things would surely be worse. There is, however, an uncomfortable question we need to ask.

My community
I see the reason for it every day where I live in Armley, in Leeds. My husband is a vicar here and I work in a local community centre. Our church runs the busiest food bank in Leeds. There are another two food pantries nearby and our warm space is full every week.

I know a single mum locally who works hard and does everything she can for her children. Three years ago, she messaged us about a community event at church and told us she had 13p left in her purse. Recently, she wrote about struggling just to put the electricity on, let alone afford a bus ride or an ice cream for her children. She isn't a statistic. She's someone I've got to know over the years. She's brilliant, and she sometimes helps at our church community events herself.

Changing nature of poverty
Before coming to this work, I spent six and a half years leading Church Engagement at Christians Against Poverty. There too I saw the nature of poverty changing. We could help someone become debt free, only to see them fall back into difficulty. Increasingly, the problem wasn't simply managing money better. Sometimes the numbers just didn't add up.

And all this is happening despite an extraordinary expansion of Christian social action. In 2010/11, Trussell distributed around 60,000 emergency food parcels; by 2025, it was more than 2.6 million. Over the same period, churches have established debt centres, night shelters, food pantries, employment programmes and countless other forms of practical support. Thank God they have. But when 21% of the UK population lives in poverty, we have to ask some difficult questions. What is Christian social action achieving? Where should our efforts go? And what should the future of church-based projects be?

'Sins of social action'
Readers of *Grace + Truth* may recognise these questions. Jon Kuhrt has been writing about these questions for many years. His thinking, alongside conversations with Jenny Sinclair of Together for the Common Good, gradually crystallised around three tensions, which he dubbed the "three sins of social action" https://gracetruth.blog/2024/03/09/the-sins-of-social-action/

Charity without justice. Christians have become very good at responding to need. But are we asking often enough why that need exists in the first place?

Creating dependency Our desire to help is good. But can the way we help sometimes turn neighbours into passive recipients, overlooking their gifts, agency and capacity to contribute?

Secularisation. As Christian charities have professionalised and become increasingly dependent on external funding, many have become less confident about the faith that started the work in the first place. How do we address the slide into secularism?

These questions led to Jon's *Grace, Truth and the Common Good*: *the Future of Christian Social Action* lecture in 2024, commissioned by Together for the Common Good, and a further report written jointly by him and Jenny, published in 2025. https://t4cg.substack.com/p/the-2024-series-ep02-grace-truth

Testing this hypothesis
This three-fold framework was still essentially a hypothesis. Were these really the right questions? Did people working in Christian social action recognise them? And was there any appetite to do something about them? That is where I came in. I joined Jon and Jenny in 2025, when it became clear there was interest across the sector to take this further. Together we named this work "Crossroads" and resolved to test the feasibility of further development.

Up to this point we were all devoting our time to this project on a pro bono basis. In January 2026 a Trust generously agreed to fund a four-month feasibility study which I then led as a freelance consultant. Between March and July, I spoke with leaders from across Christian social action and church-based charity. The study eventually involved 73 practitioners, charity leaders, funders, theologians and senior church leaders, from Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Salvation Army and Evangelical traditions. It has been a real privilege to meet such inspiring and dedicated people.

I was determined to test the extent to which the three-fold framework resonated – and to gauge the feasibility of something that could genuinely help Christian social action respond appropriately in the new era.

Testing, challenging, deepening
We weren't interested in simply finding people who agreed with the proposition. We needed people to test the thinking, challenge it and deepen it. They did. Some were keen to emphasise the enormous value of existing Christian social action and cautioned against language that might diminish what is already being achieved. Look at the millions of people helped, they argued. Imagine how much worse things might be without it. As one participant put it: "Don't dismiss charity: it is love in action."

The conversations also helped us sharpen the language we were using around dependency and empowerment. A Christian understanding of the person is relational: *we need one another*. What emerged clearly through the study was the importance of interdependence – relationships in which everyone is recognised as having gifts to offer as well as needs to be met.

Part of the Community
That resonated with something I've seen in Armley, Leeds. A man I'll call Mick first came to us through the food pantry and warm space. Over time he became part of the community and was eventually confirmed at church.

But I've noticed how easy it is, even with the best intentions, to keep seeing someone like Mick primarily as a person to be served. When he's asked to help instead – putting out chairs or doing the washing up – his face lights up. He isn't simply receiving. He's contributing too. That small distinction gets to the heart of what we mean by *interdependence*. Christian social action should not divide people neatly into those who give and those who receive. We all have needs. We all have gifts. And we belong to one another.

Different emphasises
The conversations also revealed different emphases. Frontline practitioners tended to place a stronger emphasis on justice, while senior leaders and funders were often more concerned about maintaining Christian distinctiveness.

Justice itself proved particularly challenging to talk about. Christians running a soup kitchen may well ask why people need the soup kitchen in the first place. But what do they do with the answer? How does a Christian organisation speak about structural injustice without simply becoming aligned with a political tribe? These were not easy questions, nor did everyone answer them in the same way. But that was part of what made the process valuable. People from very different Christian traditions and different parts of the social action sector were able to wrestle with the same questions together.

A framework we can build on
Throughout those conversations, something important became clear: *the three questions held up.* There was strong support for the framework. Perhaps most importantly, the framework created space for people with very different theological traditions, experiences and instincts to wrestle with shared questions. That feels significant to me.

Christian social action does not need another initiative telling people what they are doing wrong. What we heard instead was an appetite to learn from one another: to bring together charity and justice, compassion and empowerment, social action and faith, without pretending the tensions between them are easy to resolve.

As the conversations continued, they pointed towards an even deeper question that is becoming increasingly pressing in these uncertain times. What is the Christian vision of human flourishing? The sector talks a great deal about tackling poverty, meeting need and delivering services. All of these matter. But what is the Christian vision of the person we are serving?

If every person is made in the image of God, surely our ambition cannot end with helping someone survive a crisis. It must also be about dignity and purpose, meaningful relationships, discovering and using our gifts, and having something to contribute to the lives of others. One participant put the challenge even more simply: "What is the good news for the poor?" His question has stayed with me.

We don't have to start from scratch
One of the most encouraging things about the research was surfacing how much good practice already exists. Across the country, there are encouraging examples of Christians already beginning to find ways to move beyond simply delivering services. Food pantries offering more participatory alternatives to transactional models of food aid. Relational church-based investment models helping people move out of homelessness. Employment programmes helping people find work and recognise the gifts they have to offer. Community enterprises creating opportunities for people to contribute rather than simply receive.

There are people already making the shift to address the disconnects we've identified. What we did not find was an initiative intentionally holding all three dimensions together: justice, empowerment and Christian distinctiveness – and doing so across Christian traditions. That is where we believe Crossroads can help.

Not by creating another organisation competing for territory. Not by suggesting that good work isn't already happening. But by connecting people, learning from what already works, recovering the theological foundations of Christian social action and creating space to work through the difficult questions together.

Where next?
The feasibility study has given us confidence to continue. We are proposing a long-term programme to encourage a cultural shift in Christian social action, beginning with a two-year foundation phase. If funded, we will tell the stories of approaches that are already working, deepen the theological foundations, share good practice, work with funders and create communities of practice in which people can learn from one another.

We began with three deliberately provocative questions. Seventy-three conversations later, we have something stronger. We have a framework that has been tested, challenged and refined. We have found practical examples showing that different ways of working are possible. And we have found a broad appetite among Christians from very different traditions to continue this work together.

The ancient paths, the good way
For me, this comes back to what I see in Armley. The food bank matters. The warm space matters. Being there for someone in crisis matters. We should never diminish the extraordinary generosity and commitment of Christians who do these things week after week. But perhaps we are being called to ask what comes next.

How do we respond to immediate need while also asking why that need exists? How do we recognise people not simply for what they need, but for what they can give? And how do we ensure that our response remains recognisably Christian – one that builds genuine solidarity, and that is rooted in a vision of the dignity, relationships and flourishing for which every person was made?

Jeremiah's words have accompanied this work from the beginning:
"Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it."

We are at the crossroads. The task now is to discern the good way and walk it together.

https://gracetruth.blog/2026/10/02/standing-at-the-crossroads-rethinking-christian-social-action-by-rachel-arnold/?jetpack_skip_subscription_popup

Read the full Crossroads report
https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Crossroads-Study-FINAL-Sept2026.pdf

- **Rachel Arnold lives in Leeds and is Co-Founder of the Crossroads Initiative**

THE VOICE OF REASON IN A SECULAR AGE
Ian Linden Oct 7,2026
Britain seems constrained to join other European States in re-armament. Putin's fantasy of Ukraine's return to the Russian Federation and a restoration of the former Soviet territory, Xi Jinping's determination to absorb Taiwan by all means available, seem utterly intractable, a grave injustice if accomplished. Military deterrence is an understandable response. At one level, this 'confrontational logic' seems to make sense. But it is ultimately the victory of emotion over reason.

After earlier this year the Pope had taken the USA and Trump to task over the war in Iran, Leo didn't shy away from addressing Europe and its leaders on preparations for war, though less forcefully, in a speech at the Robert Schuman Centre in Metz on 28 September. He compared their present stance to the vision of the founding fathers of the European Union, an exemplar of peaceful relations, making in Schuman's words "any war…not only unthinkable but materially impossible"

"Today we must ask whether we are truly making 'creative efforts' to advance world peace", the Pope said "or whether we are simply seeking to 'stem the tide of war' and better prepare ourselves for wars that we assume are still to come". The title of his talk was "The Roots of Europe for Peace and Unity"; Schuman and De Gasperi were clearly influenced by their Catholicism in their founding vision for post-war Europe. It is an important reminder but not one a nation blighted by BREXIT is likely to heed, even given a Prime Minister with a Catholic upbringing. Least of all with Putin's war of aggression – the majority of Ukrainians wish to be European not a part of the Russian Federation – gaining in intensity and threats.

"World peace cannot be safeguarded if constructive efforts are not made commensurate with the dangers that threaten it" as the Pope put it. And these dangers are obvious, not least to young people who may have to live through their consequences as diplomacy risks becoming seen as a futile if necessary routine. Leo steers a difficult, but traditional, course rejecting "a naïve form of pacifism" balancing the right to self-defence against a condemnation of "repeated calls to increase military spending and the choices that follow" – which today appear to many as thoroughly justified for self-defence.

There isn't much moral wriggle-room for Christians to be drawn from the early Church's witness to non-violence. Nor in Matthew 26.52: "Put your sword back in its place" as Peter acts to defend Jesus. I was very fortunate to get to know the late Bruce Kent in the last years of his life and to develop a great admiration for his work, that of his wife, Valerie Flessati and Pax Christi. They are far from naïve. And they are, and have been, creative in their peace-making despite minimal support from the Hierarchy.

At another level, the Vatican's Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, answerable to the Secretariat of State, trains its diplomats, nuncios, in diplomacy, and has traditionally given peace-making and peace-building top priority as an aspect of evangelisation. They should not be criticised for engaging diplomatically with tyrannical and authoritarian regimes. Especially given this is deemed impossible for Western democratic States except intermittently, clandestinely and at their peril.

In the 2025 reckoning by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global expenditure on weapons amounted to $2,887 billion, 2.5% of global GBP. Or in figures that you can take in, each person on earth spent $325 dollars to kill each other or prevent that happening, money which might have fed them or contributed to building a school – instead of bombing it. The parents of the 120 children killed by a US bomb in Minab school, Tehran, wrote to thank the Pope for his anguished words, calling him "the voice of the voiceless children".

The UK Foreign Office once had officers dedicated solely to human rights working in British Embassies and High Commissions. No more. Specialists survive in local politics and economics, or rather investment, selling British goods, fostering favourable relations with the UK, plus military attachés, and MI6 under diplomatic cover. And of course, ambassadors increasingly outpaced by data flows through social media, responsible for insightful reports to London, and social gatherings of the good and the great, words in ears over canapés. The old Department for International Development, budget plundered, the poor relative now merged with the Foreign Office. Staffing 'commensurate with the dangers that threaten world peace?" I don't think so.

But imagine just 1% of the forthcoming UK military expenditure up to 2035 being spent on Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) staffing by experts in peace-making and peace-building, and in training diplomats with fluency in Chinese, Russian and Arabic for dialogue with despots. It is a choice. Fanciful perhaps but not 'naïve pacifism'. Would their work make a difference? Some. Building mutual trust is a marathon not a sprint. But listening, goodness and virtue in the long term can be literally disarming – as Leo points out. If there is any hope of swinging the balance from – manipulated – emotion to reason, a thoroughly Catholic strategy, such an earmarked, increased allocation to peace-building by the FCDO must be made.

If diplomatic efforts are not significantly and dramatically increased, we will remain trapped in confrontational logic and repeated defeats for democracy as, in Pope Leo's words, "people boast of lies and deceptions". It is an irony that in this, our secular epoch which claims descent from the Enlightenment, it is a Pope, growing in popularity, who provides the voice of reason.
https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs

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

SALESIAN VIEWPOINT: MANCHESTERISM IN SCHOOLS
Fr David O'Malley September 3, 2026
Lucy Powell, our Education Secretary, has promised to explore qualification pathways for vocational courses within the existing GCSE structures. If this happens it could be the first time that government has stepped away from a totally academic shape to GCSE qualifications at the end of many pupils' educational journeys. Many of these technical awards, equivalent to GCSEs, already exist and many schools offer these to a few pupils who find the academic and school life difficult. This initiative is likely to increase the availability and the status of the awards across the country.

The government identified that one of the reasons for the increase in NEETs (not in Education, Employment or Training) across the country is the absence of a pathway from a narrow academic school life and the world of work. That discrepancy seems to create a cliff edge for some students who plummet in confidence and in opportunities to enter the world of work.

Some of the proposals are scheduled for introduction in late 2027 and major changes will follow in 2028. Some might call this an example of "Manchesterism" where a baccalaureate has been established to support this transition to work from school. That "MBacc" model will have a large influence on what happens nationally as a kind of pilot project for the whole country.

The MBacc aims to provide five opportunities:
1. Technical learning,
2. Work experience,
3. Employer encounters,
4. Digital enrichment,
5. Careers conversations.

The shape of these learning patterns will have some consistency across the country but will have marked regional variation according to the needs of local industry and the availability of learning partnerships. The local Mayoral authorities will also have an opportunity to shape this vocational provision. Then there are plans in the making to introduce "V" levels alongside A and T levels for post 16 students.

Ken Robinson, a well-known educational thinker, accused secondary education of aiming to make everyone a University Professor and structuring itself like a mini university with departments and a focus on a narrow form of intelligence and ignoring other aspects of human knowing that are much more applicable to life. Thing like honesty, empathy, teamwork, creativity, practical problem solving, drama, sport and spirituality. All of these things can wilt away in the shadow of academics and never see the light of day, never receive recognition that leads to their growth.

As Salesian educators we should welcome this initiative because it takes us back to our roots in Turin in the 1840s. It was there that Don Bosco opened schools for academic learning alongside workshops in key skills like printing, woodworking, construction, and book binding. He was always thinking of two pathways into life and work. To that curriculum he also added music, drama and sport and catechesis to complete a rounded offer to his young people. He went out into the town and found placements for his students in settings that would grow into permanent employment. In addition, he followed his students up and drew up contracts for them and followed the up into the future to ensure they were not exploited.

The experience of many educators such as Don Bosco, Froebel and Pestalozzi point to the need for a broad spectrum of education to capture the talents of the young, to help those talents grow and to build youthful confidence for a changing world.

Ken Robinson suggests that we have turned our secondary schools into factories that crush the life of young people through interminable testing, league tables and narrow views of the role of schools. He suggests that the factory model should be dropped in favour of a farm model where nurture, varying growth rates and individual needs are all recognised.

In the helterskelter search for academic excellence according to expected levels at specific ages we have turned young people into cohorts, outputs of a mass production system that is no longer fit for purpose. I hope that this move towards the vocational aspects of education will help to heal our secondary school pupils from the tyranny of testing and competition.
https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/55791

LINK
Salesian Schools: www.salesianschools.com/post/manchesterism-in-school

THE FUTURE IS OUTDOORS.
Mary Colwell Oct 13, 2026
Today's reports carry warnings from clinicians about excessive screen use and children's health and development. They should make us pause and ask what kind of education we want for our children.

The GCSE in Natural History offers an antidote - time spent outside paying attention to the living world. A screen cannot give you the texture of bark, the smell of rain on earth, watch a swallow turn in the wind, or a beetle negotiate a blade of grass, these bring encounters no screen can recreate. Nature study has the potential to shift our idea of education towards the real, the physical, the visceral. Towards curiosity, close observation and the delight of discovering other lives unfolding around us.

The proposed GCSE includes a minimum of 20 hours of outdoor fieldwork. A beginning, with the potential for so much more. Schools need to nurture that familiarity throughout primary and early secondary education, so children arrive ready to explore, notice and learn.

Curlew Action is the home of the GCSE in Natural History campaign. We are working to secure its development and help children get ready to take it. Our children belong to a living, breathing, singing, buzzing, swimming, flying community of life. Let's give them an education that helps them feel part of it. Please support us!
https://www.curlewaction.org/donorbox/

• **Mary Colwell is the Director of Curlew Action and is a writer, TV and radio producer and conservationist**. Mary's massive walk across the breadth of the UK in 2016 helped raise the profile of the Curlew, and led her to write the greatly influential *Curlew Moon*. Mary founded Curlew Action in late-2019 after a series of talks, meetings and forums among experts discussing what was most needed to rescue the rapidly declining UK Curlew population. She is the author of three more books: *John Muir: The Scotsman Who Saved America's Wild Places; Beak, Tooth and Claw: Living with Predators in Britain;* and *The Gathering Place: A Winter Pilgrimage Through Changing Times.*
https://www.curlewaction.org/author/marycolwell/

NATURAL HISTORY GSCE UPDATE
CURLEW ACTION NEWSLETTER | Issue 04, 2026 Michael Warren, Trustee & Mary Colwell
The proposed subject content for the forthcoming GCSE in Natural History (including the recommendation that students complete at least 20 hours field work) was revealed for public consultation in June this year (deadline for comments 4th September), giving all with an interest in this qualification, including the general public, an opportunity to share their views: GCSE natural history proposed subject content - Department for Education - Citizen Space. https://consult.education.gov.uk/gcse-and-a-level-policy-team/gcse-natural-history-proposed-subject-content/

This is a significant improvement on the first iteration of the subject criteria, and there is much to welcome. But this is also the moment to get it right. One striking omission is the uplands: moorland, upland heath, blanket bog and montane habitats are an important part of the British landscape and support some of our most characteristic and threatened wildlife. They should be explicitly represented alongside lowland, freshwater, coastal and urban habitats.

We would also like to see much greater emphasis on the use of field notebooks or nature journals. The notebook has always been one of the naturalist's essential tools: a place to record what is seen, heard and noticed, to sketch, question, compare and return to observations over time. Encouraging every student to keep a field notebook throughout the course would help turn the proposed 20 hours of fieldwork from a series of visits into the development of a sustained habit of attention.

There will inevitably be a temptation to load the GCSE with other important concerns – climate change, sustainability, farming and wider environmental issues. These have their place, but they should not obscure the distinctive purpose of this qualification. At its heart, this should be a GCSE about studying nature: learning to identify species and habitats, observing closely, recording carefully, understanding relationships and changes, and developing the skills and habits of a naturalist. If it remains faithful to that purpose, it will offer young people something genuinely distinctive that is largely missing from education today.

The Department for Education will then review this feedback and make further relevant changes to the course content. Exam boards will then develop detailed specifications and assessments. The expectation is that the GCSE will be available from September 2028/9, in line with the rollout of revised GCSE curriculum generally.
https://www.curlewaction.org/wp-content/uploads/Aug-Newsletter.pdf

Sign up for the Curlew Action Newsletter here: https://www.curlewaction.org/newsletter/

A LITANY FOR THE WEST BANK AND GAZA
With the suffering people of the West Bank and Gaza on our hearts, we make our cry:
'O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, listen and act and do not delay.' *(Daniel 9.19)*
Lord, hear us.

'They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastation of many generations.' *(Isaiah 61.4)*

Lord, we lift before you so many who weep in desolation and long for hope.
Lord, hear us.

The things that make for peace are hidden. *(Luke 19.42)*
Lord, let your light shine in the darkness, bringing a new dawn of hope.
Lord, hear us.

'Blessed are the peacemakers'. *(Matthew 5.9)*
Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, give them wisdom and guide them in your ways.
Lord, hear us.

'Blessed are the merciful.' *(Matthew 5.7*)
Lord, strengthen those in every community who strive for reconciliation.
Bless, encourage and protect them.
Lord, hear us.

'Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.' *(Ps.30.5)*
We pray for the homeless, the unemployed, all bereft of hope, and those striving tirelessly to support them.
Lord, hear us.

'I was sick and you took care of me.' *(Matthew 25.36)*
Bless and sustain all doctors, nurses, and all whose skills, presence and dedication bring healing and hope.
Jesus, Prince of Peace, with your Church in the Holy Land,
let us never be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. *(Romans 12.21)*
Amen. Amen.
Friends of the Holy Land https://www.friendsoftheholyland.org.uk/about-us

SABEEL-KAIROS: SEEKING A JUST PEACE FOR PALESTINE
Oct 11, 2026: A deeply moving reflection from a Palestinian participant who joined our Wave of Prayer at Greenbelt:

"I joined the prayer with Sabeel-Kairos UK… I am a Muslim, and I found myself standing inside a Christian prayer for my country…… Nobody looked at me as a stranger who had wandered into the wrong tent. They simply opened the circle and let me in, as though I had always been part of it."

Moments like these remind us of the deep solidarity, shared history, and joint hope for justice across faiths and borders. Join us as we continue to pray and act for peace with justice in Palestine.
#SabeelKairos #Greenbelt #WaveOfPrayer #PrayForPalestine #InterfaithSolidarity #Gaza #SaintPorphyrius

NEW GENERAL SECRETARY OF PAX CHRISTI ENGLAND AND WALES
Oct 27, 2026 Fr Joe Ryan (Acting Chair) writes: I would like to announce that Anna Blackman has accepted the position of General Secretary of Pax Christi England and Wales.

For many years Anna has been dedicated to peace-making and nonviolence inspired by Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching. She has been involved with Pax Christi Scotland, and now based in England is a member of Pax Christi England and Wales. Anna has most recently been a staff member of Glasgow University, lecturing in Catholic education; while there she has been involved with students, encouraging these young people into the peace movement, and into nonviolent witness for bridge-building.

We wish Anna well in her new role, which she takes up in January 2027. We pledge her every possible support and we look forward to continuing our work together towards building a peace-filled world.
https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/56171

LINK
Pax Christi England and Wales: https://paxchristi.org.uk/



AI, SECURITY AND PEACE An Online Presentation Thursday 12 November, 7.00pm - 8.30pm
Offered by Pax Christi members Aaron Humphriss and Emmanuel Fisseha
Register here: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/kDePKXC3QEKCXUfEDvIoAA#/registration

DIARY DATES

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