

Mercy and the Common Good: Our Responsibility

Europe is the baker in Kos who gives away his bread to hungry and weary souls.

Europe is the students in Munich and in Passau who bring clothes for the new arrivals at the train station.

Europe is the policeman in Austria who welcomes exhausted refugees upon crossing the border.

This is the Europe I want to live in.

Jean-Claude Juncker
President of the European Commission
9 September 2015



J&P Conference 2016:
Justice, Power and Responsibility:
How Can Democracy Work for the Common Good?



Friday 15 - Sunday 17 July 2016
The Hayes Conference Centre
Swanwick, Derbyshire

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‘Only mercy can truly contribute to a more human world’. Pope Francis emphasises again and again that it’s only mercy that can challenge the ‘globalised indifference’ that enables injustice and mercilessness to carry on. He sees a loving, personal responsibility as the foundation for the Common Good. It requires opening our minds and hearts to the dignity of every human person, including those with whom we disagree.

Having a Jesuit for a pope means we are to be on our toes when it comes to how we apply Catholic social teaching. It’s not enough to assume that it is ‘in our DNA’ or that we learn it by osmosis. There is a temptation to pick and mix, ignore some of the principles altogether, to speak a lot about solidarity and rather less about its equal partner subsidiarity, which stresses responsibility at the appropriate level and decisions taken closest to where they will have their effect. There is a tendency to forget that Catholic social teaching critiques not only capitalism but collectivism too. By introducing mercy into the equation, Pope Francis is showing us that both market and state will always have a tendency to dehumanise unless they are tempered by a more human, healthy civil society.

We have mistakenly put our faith in an administrative, procedural system where both market and state have become too dominant: neither can grapple with the poverty of relationships, the lack of power, agency and hope in people’s lives. Nor can they muster an understanding of the essential nature of trust, faithfulness, the sense of belonging and place, the necessity of skill and the institutions required to preserve and maintain honesty and vocation. These are things for which we must take responsibility. It is about rehumanising a system in which there is not enough love.

With this injunction to get personal, we may need to reconsider if donating to charity, joining demonstrations, campaigns and speaking out is really enough. What Pope Francis in this year of mercy is asking us to do is to offer a handshake, not a handout, to struggling families and communities, and work *with* them, not *for* them, to empower and encourage their own leadership.

When the ‘soft power’ of mercy gets involved, the messy and beautiful reality of humanity is revealed, and it becomes clear that the Common Good is a practice which requires us to balance competing interests through constant renegotiation: between marginalised and powerful, left and right, faith and secular, educated and uneducated, consumers and shareholders, management and employees, urban and rural, old and young. The Common Good is not a fixed set of conditions, a utopian ideal to be imposed by one enlightened group upon another. It is about working out those conditions together. That means brokering relationships between those who hold different views and traditions, both political and cultural. The gifts that each of us brings are necessary if we are to build a viable, sustainable common life together.

If we are to succeed in a new settlement for the Common Good, then we will all need to put our shoulders to the wheel and work together. The churches of all denominations, especially the laity, are well-placed to be at the heart of the solution, if we get out of our comfort zones, face outwards and open up to unlikely partnerships, and commit ourselves to bridge building - in our parishes, workplaces, in our social, political, economic and cultural life.

In an increasingly fragmented, unequal and divided society like ours, there is nothing more important than the reconciliation of estranged interests for the Common Good – it is an outworking of mercy, which, integrated with our spirituality and vocation, turns our desire for justice into a highly personal mission.

© Jenny Sinclair

Together for the Common Good, January 2016



Jenny Sinclair is one of the speakers at the Annual Justice & Peace Conference in July 2016.

You can find the texts of the articles in this newsletter at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk, or contact NJPN for a hard copy.

Speaking Personally: Anne O'Connor



Where do you think your commitment to justice and peace comes from?

One of my first year modules at university was modern American history. I was deeply moved by the gross injustices highlighted by the Civil Rights Movement. Segregation in South Africa was high on the agenda too and I joined the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Thereafter, with a growing family, my sole involvement was buying Fair Trade coffee

from a stand at church. But the seed was sown - years later I became a Traidcraft Key Contact.

We moved to Greater Manchester in 1984. The first week in our new parish something extraordinary happened: a stranger turned round after Mass and asked me to help form a J&P group! We were all novices but quickly learnt. I offered to put together a regular news sheet for parishioners. I later took this to a diocesan J&P meeting and was invited to edit the fledgling Shrewsbury Diocese newsletter, *The Daily Pressure*, eventually joining with Liverpool under the new name *MouthPeace*. In 2006 fellow commission member Marian Thompson became editor, freeing up my time for writing/presenting resources for schools, Confirmation and parish J&P groups.

In June 2012 our new Bishop announced the enforced redundancy of all diocesan commission paid workers. Commission members sub-divided the workload of our former Co-ordinator to keep J&P afloat. I took over the monthly e-bulletin to ensure a point of contact for parish groups. In August 2013 most of us, myself included, received letters terminating our involvement. I was approached by NJPN to join their media team and now produce a monthly e-bulletin for five dioceses in the North West.

What for you are the most important areas of concern today?

The disbanding of J&P Commissions and compulsory redundancies of workers is a worry. Wherever cuts are made for financial reasons J&P seems to be the first casualty, despite its broad range of issues being crucial, not just for ourselves but for generations to come.

It sickens me that the UK government proudly promotes the sale of arms to oppressive regimes yet ignores the link with situations that force desperate people to risk everything by fleeing their homelands. No refugee chooses this path lightly. As the Somali poet Warsan Shire says: *'no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.'*

Today the richest 1% of people own more than the rest of world combined. This cannot be right. UK Government policies penalise the very poorest, for example the draconian bedroom tax and proposed changes to the tax credit system. For many food banks are essential for day-to-day living, but this merely papers over the cracks and fails to get to the heart of the problem. Rather than targeting the poor, why not introduce legislation to recoup money from companies who dodge UK tax by using off-shore accounts?

What sustains you in your commitment?

I believe there is good in everyone. For us to live in harmony with our fellow men and women, and with the world God has created for our stewardship, we must strive towards the common good. Margaret Thatcher once declared: *'there is no such thing as society.'* On the contrary - through caring social interaction we harness what is best in humankind. When we put the needs of others before our own we are living the gospel message. I see many small acts of kindness by ordinary people that give hope for the future.

In recent years there's been an encouraging rise in 'people power' through marches, letter writing and online petitions. Governments and corporations are taking notice of public opinion and modifying their policies accordingly.

The power of forgiveness inspires me. The Forgiveness Project www.theforgivenessproject.com and the initiative set up for victims of crime in England and Wales, Why Me? www.why-me.org bring together victims and perpetrators to aid understanding. Forgiveness is central to Jesus' teachings. If we sincerely forgive seventy times seven times (Matthew 18: 22) we can experience peace in our hearts.

I'm encouraged by the success of Hope not Hate www.hopenothate.org.uk challenging the rise of extremism in the UK. Building bridges between different faith communities, celebrating what we have in common, is essential to achieving peace. In my home town, Altrincham, we have a thriving Inter Faith group that enables different congregations to socialise and discover more about each other.

What are your hopes for a Church like ours for the 21st Century?

The Church is in a time of flux: an ageing and diminishing priestly population; dwindling congregations; challenges to long-held views. Whilst some see this as a cause for concern I think it provides an opportunity for the Spirit to revitalise the Church in a new and exciting way. To facilitate change priests and people alike must heed the signs of the times and respond wisely. We need a fuller collaboration between clergy and laity, appreciating the many gifts lay people offer; the acceptance of married men to the priesthood; a greater respect for women so we will no longer be second class. Women make up more than half the congregation yet, although the glass ceiling has been broken in many areas, we still live in the shadows within the Church. True equality will only be achieved when women are admitted to the diaconate and ultimately to the priesthood.

We also need a heartfelt and lasting commitment to young people. At present little is done to encourage and inspire them and they see no relevance in church-going. This must change if the Church is to survive. Whilst many teenagers feel a strong sense of social justice, their enthusiasm and gifts are under-used in parish life. J&P can play a key role in Confirmation preparation leading to involvement in the local community and the wider world.

Above all, I pray for a Church where everyone feels welcome: an open, accepting, non-judgemental Church with a place at the table for all.

Anne O'Connor has been involved in Justice and Peace as a lay volunteer since 1984. In addition to producing newsletters and e-bulletins she has written drama, poetry, action sheets, Stations of the Cross and a J&P based Confirmation Programme for young people, plus seasonal material and prayer reflections for adult groups. She is a regular contributor to the NJPN column in the The Universe.

A warm welcome to our patron Sarah Teather, who has taken up the post of Director of Jesuit Refugee Service UK this January.



Louise Zanre, the Director for the past 15 years, will happily still be around, working Policy Advisor

Read more at www.jrsuk.net

Welcoming the Stranger: J&P Responds to the Refugee Crisis

2015 saw the flow of refugees to Europe, already creating tragedies in the Mediterranean, increase exponentially. We have become used to seeing the images of processions of desperate people streaming along roads, boarding trains and being blocked at borders, and hearing of the daily toll of deaths of people fleeing war, persecution and the impacts of climate change drowning in the seas in their attempts to reach Europe.

On 6 September 2015 Pope Francis called on 'every parish, every religious community, every monastery and every sanctuary in Europe ... to host a family...'. There was an outpouring of good will across the continent and in our own country, particularly after the images of the death of Alan Kurdi were picked up by the media. This forced the UK government, slow to react to calls to take in more refugees on the grounds that it was by far the biggest funder of aid in the refugee camps in countries bordering Syria, to promise to resettle 20,000 vulnerable refugees from the camps in the UK over the next 5 years, i.e. about 4,000 per year.

In response to this the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales asked for a someone to be appointed in each diocese to co-ordinate offers of help and support and to work with the civil authorities to assist in the welcome of those being brought in as part of the resettlement programme. Several of those co-ordinators are Justice and Peace workers or commissions, while other J&P people have been getting involved in their local areas. As we enter 2016, what has been the experience so far, and what is needed as we go forward? There has been a generous response financially and in offers of help, but how best to direct this help has been an issue.

In relation to the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), dioceses are working with Local Authorities who are responsible for resettling the refugees. Liverpool is aiming to set up local support groups to co-ordinate activity on the basis of local authority areas. Volunteers will be needed to create welcoming communities for these refugees.

While initially much attention was given to offering accommodation, spare rooms are not necessarily appropriate for those under the VPRS, and rules relating to accommodating refugees can make this difficult. Arundel & Brighton diocese are hoping to appoint a Project Worker to look at setting up hosting schemes and other ways to utilize offers of support.

However, as well as being woefully inadequate as a response to the scale of the need, the resettlement programme does raise the question, are we creating two classes of refugees, with asylum seekers already here facing delays, obstacles and destitution either because of failures in the system, or because

their claim has been refused and they are appealing the decision? People are therefore being encouraged to support the many projects already in existence around the country by e.g. befriending, language classes, drop-in centres, material help – to find out more go to your diocesan co-ordinator (links below) or J&P contact or contact NJPN.

Others have been working to offer support to those on the move and in camps across Europe, and particularly those in Calais. Southwark and Westminster J&P have been supporting a group, 'Seeking Sanctuary' which has been helping migrants in Calais for some time. People are generally encouraged to give financial help, which can be done via CAFOD and CSAN. If you wish to donate material goods or volunteer to help, the website www.calaisaid.co.uk has updates of current needs and how to organise goods.

Over recent months we have seen the initial popular outpouring of sympathy for those trying to move across Europe turn to fear and xenophobia as the European Union has failed to rise to the challenge of a coherent response to welcome and resettle them, focussing rather on how to keep people out. As well as a practical challenge, this also raises questions about the fundamental values of the European Union and the UK. So there is a need for Justice and Peace people to engage with politicians to seek a just response to what is a long-term issue. In a letter to David Cameron from several NGOs in January these principles were set out:

- The UK should take a fair and proportionate share of refugees, both those already within the European Union and those still outside it.
- Safe and legal routes to the UK, as well as to the European Union, need to be established.
- There should be access to fair and thorough procedures to determine eligibility for international protection wherever it is sought.

Read the full letter here, and use it to write to your MP/MEP [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/6521/Joint NGO letter on refugee crisis.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/6521/Joint%20NGO%20letter%20on%20refugee%20crisis.pdf)

Other links:

Catholic Bishops' Conference: <http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Home/Featured/Refugee-Crisis-Open-Your-Hearts> - You will find links for your diocesan co-ordinators here, as well as ways to donate.

Diocesan J&P contacts: <http://justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-contacts/>

Seeking Sanctuary: <http://seekingsanctuary.weebly.com/>

Hosting refugees: In London www.housingjustice.org.uk

Outside London: www.naccomm.org.uk

Ann Kelly



From the Archive: The Fairtrade Mark

Summer 1994

Set up by Christian Aid, CAFOD, New Consumer, OXFAM, Traidcraft Exchange and the World Development Movement, the Fairtrade Foundation has set standards for this award of the Fairtrade Mark. This is a crucial time for the fair trade initiative. If retailers and manufacturers see that there really is high consumer demand they may introduce their own ranges of products with the 'people friendly' guarantee. Please continue to support the Fairtrade Mark by buying products and encouraging others to do the same, and by lobbying your supermarket managers to stock more fairly traded items.'



A GROVE OF CACAO TREES SET UP BY CAFOD AND CHRISTIAN AID WON A BRONZE AWARD AT THE CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW IN MAY. THE 12 TREES, NESTLING AMONG RECYCLED ENVELOPES AND ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY ROPE, MADE UP AN EXHIBITION PROMOTING FAIR TRADE. PASSERS BY ENJOYED SAMPLES OF GREEN AND BLACK'S MAYA GOLD CHOCOLATE, HOLDER OF THE FAIRTRADE MARK

FEBRUARY

- 7 Church Action on Poverty Sunday: church-poverty.org.uk; 0161 236 9321
- 8 Day of Prayer for Victims of Human Trafficking: catholicchurch.org.uk
- 10 Ash Wednesday
Witness at MoD London: paxchristi.org.uk; 020 8203 4884
- 10 Launch of the Big Shift campaign to switch to clean energy: christianaid.org.uk/bigshift
- 11 Church Action on Poverty North East AGM: Newcastle-upon-Tyne: church-poverty.org.uk, 0161 872 9294
- 12-14 Militarisation in Our Society: Birmingham: woodbrooke.org.uk/courses; 0121 472 5171
- 13 **NJPN Open Networking Day** with Church Action on Poverty: Manchester: justice-and-peace.org.uk; 020 7901 4864
- 19 CAFOD Lent Fast Day
- 20 World Day of Social Justice: un.org/esa/socdev/social/intldays/IntlJustice/
- 27 Stop Trident March: London: cnduk.org/StopTrident
- 29 & 1 March 'Oh What a Lovely War-Resistance' musical evening of historical opposition to war: London paxchristi.org.uk, 020 8203 4884
- 29-13 March Fairtrade Fortnight: fairtrade.org.uk

Christian Aid and Children's Society Faith in Politics Roadshows

- 6 February Birmingham 12 March Bristol
20 February Manchester 19 March Sheffield
27 February Newcastle
www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/

MARCH

- 4 Women's World Day of Prayer: wwdp.org.uk, 01892 541411
- 5 'A Poor Church for the Poor' Conference: Leeds LasCasasInstitute.org, 01483 836 060
- 5 Million Women Rise march against male violence: London londoncatholicworker@yahoo.co.uk, 020 8348 8212
- 5 A Sustainable Future? A serious look at the new SDG's Birmingham: operationnoah.org/, 020 7324 4761
- 8 International Women's Day: internationalwomensday.com
- 8 'Think Globally Act Locally': London: Globaljustice.org.uk/events, 020 7820 4900
- 8-9 A practical Christian response to the challenges of big business to the planet and its people: Crewe aefjnuk@yahoo.uk, 07787 078 833

- 10 London Newman Lecture with Giles Fraser: London greenchristian.org.uk, 01845 45 98 460
- 18-20 Fellowship of Reconciliation Annual Conference: Scarborough for.org.uk/conf16, 01865 278 443
- 18-20 Resistance to War 1914-1924: Leeds legaciesofwar@leeds.ac.uk
- 19 Mill Hill Missionaries Jubilee Celebrations: Westminster jpimillhillbritreg@care4free.net, 01704 835 678
- 22 World Water Day: unwater.org/worldwaterday
- 27 Easter Sunday
- 31 John Dear speaking on the Beatitudes: London londoncatholicworker@yahoo.co.uk, 020 8348 8212

36th Anniversary commemoration of Romero's martyrdom
**The Violence of Peacemaking:
Archbishop Romero and the Search for Peace**
Francisco de Roux SJ, Peace Advocate in Colombia

- 15 March Scotland
16 March Leeds
17 March Manchester
19 March London, Service at St Martin in the Fields
romerotrust.org.uk, romerotrust@btinternet.com

APRIL

- 16 Concert for Peace (Beethoven): London Musicians for Peace and Disarmament, mana.org.uk
- 18 Global Day of Action on Military Spending demilitarize.org.net, or Pax Christi 020 8203 4884
- 22-24 JPIC LINKS Annual Conference: Hertfordshire margarethealysl@gmail.com, 07940 025 139
- 22-24 The Things That Make for Peace: Derbyshire Anglican Pacifist Fellowship: anglicanpeacemaker.org.uk

MAY

- 14 **NJPN AGM & Open Networking Day:** London justice-and-peace.org.uk; 020 7901 4864
- 15 International Conscientious Objectors Day paxchristi.org.uk, 0208203 4884
- 15-17 Christian Aid Week: christianaid.org.uk
- 21 Pax Christi AGM: Leeds: paxchristi.org.uk, 0208203 4884

JUNE

- 2 Planning for Climate Change conference: London Planforclimatechange.co.uk
- 5 World Environment Day: unep.org/wed
- 10-12 Green Christian Retreat: North Wales greenchristian.org.uk, 01845 45 98 460

DONATE TO NJPN: Online at www.cafonline.org, put National Justice and Peace Network in the Find a Charity box; **By cheque** payable to NJPN to the address below. To make a regular donation by **Standing Order**, contact the Administrator or download the Membership Form at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk

The National Justice & Peace Network encourages and facilitates communication and networking between Catholic/Christian individuals, groups, and organisations (both lay and religious) who are working for justice, peace and the integrity of creation at grassroots, diocesan, national or international level.

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