

The e-bulletin for the North West, linked to the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), is produced jointly by the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Please send diary dates to anneoc980@hotmail.com

REMEMBRANCE DAY AND THE ARMS TRADE

Readers of the *Leicester Mercury* newspaper have backed a controversial Remembrance Day speech made at a public event in Hinkley. Contrasting the 'hypocrisy' of prayers for peace while this country benefits from arms sales, local priest Fr Frank Daly criticised 'cynical' leaders who made decisions that lead to so many deaths and the arms trade, which makes enormous profits from war. He also voiced concern about the treatment of refugees fleeing from wars today. Although some were outraged by Fr Daly's hard-hitting words, since the newspaper published the full text (below) of Fr Daly's speech it has received many supportive comments.

"At the 11 hour on the 11 day of the 11 month, exactly one hundred years ago today, at this precise moment, the guns fell silent. And in that silence the hope was born that this so-called 'war to end all wars' would never happen again, that the hubris, pride and arrogance that caused it would never resurface and that the 20 million lives lost would not be for nothing.

"This act of remembrance which we gather for every year has of course a special poignancy today – it is something we must do, wear our poppies, gather in silence – and for many of us the reasons are personal, as we commemorate members of our own families who are among those countless dead. And so the guns fell silent – only they didn't, and they haven't and they aren't.

That same cynicism of cigar-smoking, brandy swilling generals that sent thousands of men over the top like cannon fodder to instant and painful death without any thought of who they were, their families and where they came from is still alive and well today.

"My sister in the ministry, Rev. Angela, wrote in the *Hinckley Times* this week that in remembrance today we not only remember their sacrifice but all the times we got it wrong. We must remember our own mistakes if we are to move forward.

"Those mistakes are still being made, that pride and hubris still exists, internationally, nationally and personally. Our country which prides itself on its sense of honour and justice has in many ways shamed their memory.

"Much of our economy is enhanced by the arms industry which makes over 7 billion pounds every year from the sale of weapons to countries often of dubious integrity. Trillions of pounds are spent on the creation of a weapons system that could destroy the whole planet in a week. How can we lament the effects of war if we are profiting from the sale of the means of promoting it? How can we pray for peace when we are producing the very means of destroying it?

"This is the greatest hypocrisy. We have also created a so-called 'hostile environment' to actively prevent those who are feeling the effects of war today, the butchering of their families, the destruction of their homes, fleeing for their very lives, from finding safety and asylum here, because we feel they are just 'migrants' and a drain on our economy.

"I ask you, how many of you standing here in front of me today have actually met a refugee face to face and listened to their story? How can we make judgments about them when we have never met them? How can we turn them away when they have escaped the very thing we are commemorating today?

"The words read to us by the Rev. Dimitri were chosen specially for today from the very earliest days of the Christian Church: "Where do these wars and battles between you begin?" asks the apostle James. "Isn't it precisely in the desires fighting within you? You want something and you can't have it so you are prepared to kill to get it." We have developed what we might call a 'culture of entitlement' which tells us that we can and must have anything we want whenever we want it, even if it is at the expense of others. Every angry word, every selfish thought or action has shamed the memory of these men who sought no more than to serve, a thought becoming increasingly alien to our thinking.

"Every complaint, every outrage or outburst, every time we blind ourselves to the sufferings of others with an over concern for our own profit and welfare, we dishonour those who gave so much so that we could be free from all of this. We can only honour their dying by our living, and we do so by rooting out every drop of self-interest within us so that we can open our hearts and minds to others and live peacefully and justly with them.

."The Christian faith which frames the lives of so many of us, tells us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way to the world's salvation – the gospel of peace, reconciliation and forgiveness, the gospel of putting others before ourselves even at great cost, as did he who gave away his whole life so that the world could be saved from itself.

"This is the message of truth for all times - you find your life only when you have lost it for others – a message that is more appropriate and necessary today than it ever has been. No amount of flag waving, poppy-wearing, wreath-laying, or all too brief moments of silence can ever truly honour their memory, when deep down our own needs and interests remain of paramount importance.

"It is only in the way we shape our lives today, allow our thinking to be changed, our hearts to be touched and our attitudes to be transformed, that we can create any lasting memorial to them. We can only honour their dying in our living, which surely will be our pledge to them today and for ever.

Read more here: <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/catholic-church-speaks-out-father-2211126>

A HUNDRED YEARS AFTER ARMISTICE IS A TIME FOR REMEMBRANCE AND CHANGE

12 November 2018: On the centenary of Armistice Day, Christian Aid has warned that appalling levels of violence across the globe continue to cost lives and that world leaders, including the UK's, are too often fuelling rather than preventing conflict. Christine Allen, Christian Aid's Director of Policy and Public Affairs, said: "On the centenary of the Armistice, we remember all those who have lost their lives in war around the world in the past 100 years, especially those who died during World War One. Today the prayers of all Christians must be for peace with justice, for we are called to be peacemakers."

"Yet a century after the cessation of hostilities in Europe, violence and conflict still rage around the world, so it is right to ask why governments including the UK's continue to fuel war through the arms trade and why international peace efforts are off course. Since 2016, more countries have experienced violent conflict than at any other time in nearly 30 years. If current trends persist, by 2030-more than half of the world's poor will be living in countries affected by high levels of violence. Much of this is due to reoccurring violence and protracted conflicts."

"The truest way to honour casualties of war would be to make peace a priority. Peace building can and does work. However, currently the UK does too much to fuel war and too little as a peacemaker."

Pointing to the UK's role in the arms trade, she added: "The UK sells billions of pounds worth of military equipment including to its ally Saudi Arabia which is pursuing a conflict in Yemen where British-made cluster bombs are killing Yemeni citizens. Yemen is the world's most acute humanitarian crisis yet the UK gives far more in arms than it does in aid. This solemn moment of Remembrance and the laying of wreaths at the Cenotaph sit uncomfortably with the UK government's endorsement of arms fairs, secretive licenses for deadly weapons, and ongoing military support to regimes which routinely violate human rights."

Violence is a major cause of poverty, capable of wiping out years of development and destroying thriving societies. Conflicts in Syria and Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have cost millions of lives in the past two decades. Poverty is now most concentrated in countries afflicted by chronic conflict. Over 40 million people are displaced by conflicts, over 75% of whom are concentrated in just 10 countries which are also among the world's worst war zones. Meanwhile, the cost of military spending is estimated to be nearly 250 times more than is spent on peace building.

This statement comes ahead of a landmark Christian Aid report on global peace building priorities coming out in December. The report will outline the vital importance of local peace building efforts which are often the only pathway to sustainable peace, and puts the spotlight on the role of the arms trade and UN efforts to resolve conflicts. This Christmas, Christian Aid is focusing on peace building around the world.

UNICEF has said that 400,000 children in Yemen are at risk of dying due to lack of food, 40% of whom live around the city of Hodeidah. Since June, when the latest offensive against Hodeidah began, civilian deaths have risen by 164%, and at least 50,000 people have been displaced, according to a report by the armed conflict location and event data project (ACLED). UK military sales to Saudi Arabia increased by two thirds in 2017 from 2016. This is an increase of more than £450m. This figure does not take into account the number of so-called "secret" open licences doubled across that 12 months - from 21 to 44. According to Department of International Trade figures, the UK issued 126 licences relating to military goods in 2017, with a value of £1.129bn, compared to 103 licences relating to military items in 2016, with a value of £679m.
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/35980>

YEMEN: CAMPAIGN URGES UK TO STOP ARMING SAUDI ARABIA

5 November 2018: The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) has welcomed calls by Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt for a ceasefire in Yemen. The UK government on Monday urged the UN Security Council to act over the humanitarian crisis in the country, saying there now "appears to be a window" for a peace deal. This followed a UN report showing Yemen is on the verge of the worst famine anywhere in the world for 100 years.

CAAT point out that since the war in Yemen began in March 2015, the UK has licensed almost £5 billion worth of arms to the Saudi military. The three and a half year bombing campaign has created the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. UK government statistics show that since the bombing of Yemen began in 2015, the UK has licensed £4.7 billion worth of arms to Saudi Arabia, including: £2.7 billion worth of ML10 licences (Aircraft, helicopters, drones) and £1.9 billion worth of ML4 licences (Grenades, bombs, missiles, countermeasures).

Andrew Smith of Campaign Against Arms Trade said: "The crisis in Yemen is the worst in the world, and it is one that UK arms have been central to creating. No matter how dire the situation has become, Government ministers have done everything they can to maintain arms sales and political ties to the Saudi dictatorship. The calls for a ceasefire must be welcomed, but the best thing that Jeremy Hunt and his colleagues can do for the people of Yemen is to end the arms sales and the uncritical support they have offered the Saudi regime."

Pope Francis has spoken out against the arms trade on many occasions. "It's an absurd contradiction to speak of peace, to negotiate peace, and at the same time, to promote or allow the arms trade," Pope Francis said in his prayer intentions for June 2017 - distributed by his Worldwide Prayer Network.
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/35937>

Campaign Against the Arms Trade - www.caat.org.uk

UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR DAMNING REPORT ON UK POVERTY

16 November 2018: In a press conference and written report, Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, has pulled no punches in his assessment of the UK's treatment of those in poverty.

Introduction

The UK is the world's fifth largest economy, it contains many areas of immense wealth, its capital is a leading centre of global finance, its entrepreneurs are innovative and agile, and despite the current political turmoil, it has a system of government that rightly remains the envy of much of the world. It thus seems patently unjust and contrary to British values that so many people are living in poverty. This is obvious to anyone who opens their eyes to see the immense growth in food banks and the queues waiting outside them, the people sleeping rough in the streets, the growth of homelessness, the sense of deep despair that leads even the Government to appoint a Minister for suicide prevention and civil society to report in depth on unheard of levels of loneliness and isolation. And local authorities, especially in England, which perform vital roles in providing a real social safety net have been gutted by a series of government policies. Libraries have closed in record numbers, community and youth centres have been shrunk and underfunded, public spaces and buildings including parks and recreation centres have been sold off. While the labour and housing markets provide the crucial backdrop, the focus of this report is on the contribution made by social security and related policies.

The results?

14 million people, a fifth of the population, live in poverty. Four million of these are more than 50% below the poverty line, and 1.5 million are destitute, unable to afford basic essentials. The widely respected Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts a 7% rise in child poverty between 2015 and 2022, and various sources predict child poverty rates of as high as 40%. For almost one in every two children to be poor in twenty-first century Britain is not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster, all rolled into one.

But the full picture of low-income well-being in the UK cannot be captured by statistics alone. Its manifestations are clear for all to see. The country's most respected charitable groups, its leading think tanks, its parliamentary committees, independent authorities like the National Audit Office, and many others, have all drawn attention to the dramatic decline in the fortunes of the least well off in this country. But through it all, one actor has stubbornly resisted seeing the situation for what it is. The Government has remained determinedly in a state of denial. Even while devolved authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland are frantically trying to devise ways to 'mitigate', or in other words counteract, at least the worst features of the Government's benefits policy, Ministers insisted to me that all is well and running according to plan. Some tweaks to basic policy have reluctantly been made, but there has been a determined resistance to change in response to the many problems which so many people at all levels have brought to my attention. The good news is that many of the problems could readily be solved if the Government were to acknowledge the problems and consider some of the recommendations below.

In my travels across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland I met with people living in poverty, whether old, young, disabled, in work or not. I talked with civil society, front line workers, work coaches, and officials from local, devolved, and UK governments; and visited community organisations, social housing, a Job Centre, a food bank, an advice centre, a library, and a primary school. I also met a range of Ministers in the central government and in Wales, as well as with the First Minister in Scotland. I spoke at length with politicians from all of the major political parties.

In the past two weeks I have talked with people who depend on food banks and charities for their next meal, who are sleeping on friends' couches because they are homeless and don't have a safe place for their children to sleep, who have sold sex for money or shelter, children who are growing up in poverty unsure of their future, young people who feel gangs are the only way out of destitution, and people with disabilities who are being told they need to go back to work or lose support, against their doctor's orders. I have also seen tremendous resilience, strength, and generosity, with neighbours supporting one another, councils seeking creative solutions, and charities stepping in to fill holes in government services. I also heard stories of deeply compassionate work coaches and of a regional Job Centre director who had transformed the ethos in the relevant offices.

Although the provision of social security to those in need is a public service and a vital anchor to prevent people being pulled into poverty, the policies put in place since 2010 are usually discussed under the rubric of austerity. But this framing leads the inquiry in the wrong direction. In the area of poverty-related policy, the evidence points to the conclusion that the driving force has not been economic but rather a commitment to achieving radical social re-engineering. Successive governments have brought revolutionary change in both the system for delivering minimum levels of fairness and social justice to the British people, and especially in the values underpinning it. Key elements of the post-war Beveridge social contract are being overturned. In the process, some good outcomes have certainly been achieved, but great misery has also been inflicted unnecessarily, especially on the working poor, on single mothers struggling against mighty odds, on people with disabilities who are already marginalised, and on millions of children who are being locked into a cycle of poverty from which most will have great difficulty escaping.

Most of the political debate around social well-being in the UK has focused only on the goals sought to be achieved. These goals are in many respects admirable, even though some have been controversial. They include a commitment to place employment at the heart of anti-poverty policy, a quest for greater efficiency and cost savings, a determination to simplify an excessively complicated and unwieldy benefits system, a desire to increase the uptake of benefits by those entitled, removing the 'welfare cliff' that deterred beneficiaries from seeking work, and a desire to provide more skills training.

But Universal Credit and the other far-reaching changes to the role of government in supporting people in distress are almost always 'sold' as being part of an unavoidable programme of fiscal 'austerity', needed to save the country from bankruptcy. In fact, however, the reforms have almost certainly cost the country far more than their proponents will admit. The many billions advertised as having been extracted from the benefits system since 2010 have been offset by the additional resources required to fund emergency services by families and the community, by local government, by doctors and hospital accident and emergency centres, and even by the ever-shrinking and under-funded police force.

Leaving the economics of change to one side, it is the underlying values and the ethos shaping the design and implementation of specific measures that have generated the greatest problems. The government has made no secret of its determination to change the value system to focus more on individual responsibility, to place major limits on government support, and to pursue a single-minded, and some have claimed simple-minded, focus on getting people into employment at all costs. Many aspects of this programme are legitimate matters for political contestation, but it is the mentality that has informed many of the reforms that has brought the most misery and wrought the most harm to the fabric of British society. British compassion for those who are suffering has been replaced by a punitive, mean-spirited, and often callous approach apparently designed to instill discipline where it is least useful, to impose a rigid order on the lives of those least capable of coping with today's world, and elevating the goal of enforcing blind compliance over a genuine concern to improve the well-being of those at the lowest levels of British society.

Brexit

My report comes at a critical moment in the debate over Brexit. I take no position on its merits or on the optimal terms for undertaking it, but anyone concerned with poverty in the UK has reason to be very deeply concerned. Whatever happens in the period ahead, we know that deep uncertainty will persist for a long time, that economic growth rates are likely to take a strong hit, and that tax revenues will fall significantly. If current policies towards low income working people and others living in poverty are maintained in the face of these developments, the poor will be substantially less well off than they already are. This could well lead to significant public discontent, further division and even instability, thus underscoring the importance that steps be taken now to avoid such outcomes.

There are many concerns linked to Brexit. Given the vast number of policies, programmes and spending priorities that will need to be addressed over the next few years, and the major changes that will inevitably accompany them, it is the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society who will be least able to cope and will take the biggest hit. The IMF has suggested that a no-deal Brexit could cost the UK economy somewhere between 5% and 8% of GDP, representing a loss of thousands of pounds per household.

In my meetings with the government, it was clear to me that the impact of Brexit on people in poverty is an afterthought, to be dealt with through manipulations of fiscal policy after the event, if at all. But Brexit will have serious consequences in this domain and the challenges need to be dealt with head on. A lack of clarity is preventing families at risk of poverty from planning for its impact. People feel their homes, jobs, and communities are at risk. Ironically, it was these very fears and insecurity that contributed significantly to the Brexit vote.

Universal Credit

No single programme embodies the combination of the benefits reforms and the promotion of austerity programmes more than Universal Credit. Although in its initial conception it represented a potentially major improvement in the system, it is fast falling into Universal Discredit.

Social support should be a route out of poverty, and Universal Credit should be a key part of that process. Consolidating six different benefits into one makes good sense, in principle. But many aspects of the design and rollout of the programme have suggested that the Department for Work and Pensions is more concerned with making economic savings and sending messages about lifestyles than responding to the multiple needs of those living with a disability, job loss, housing insecurity, illness, and the demands of parenting. While some surveys suggest certain claimants do have positive experiences with Universal Credit, an increasing body of research makes clear that there are far too many instances in which Universal Credit is being implemented in ways that negatively impact many claimants' mental health, finances, and work prospects.

In addition to all of the negative publicity about Universal Credit in the UK media and among politicians of all parties, I have heard countless stories from people who told me of the severe hardships they have suffered under Universal Credit. When asked about these problems, Government ministers were almost entirely dismissive, blaming political opponents for wanting to sabotage their work, or suggesting that the media didn't really understand the system and that Universal Credit was unfairly blamed for problems rooted in the old legacy system of benefits.

The Universal Credit system is designed with a five week delay between when people successfully file a claim and when they receive benefits. Research suggests that this "waiting period," which actually often takes up to 12 weeks, pushes many who may already be in crisis into debt, rent arrears, and serious hardship, requiring them to sacrifice food or heat. Given the delay, which will only be partially mitigated by a recent concession, it is no surprise that the majority of claimants seek "advance payments," which in turn must be repaid to DWP in relatively short order. Additionally, debts to DWP and to third-parties can be deducted from already meagre Universal Credit payments at a rate much higher than is the case with the older benefit system. While supposedly deductions are capped at a maximum rate of 40% of the standard allowance portion of the payment (which will change to 30% in a year's time), the Government told me that in fact additional claw-backs can occur. These so-called "Last Resort Deductions" are for matters such as rent, gas, and electricity arrears, if it is judged to be in the best interest of a claimant or their household.

The rationales offered for the delay are entirely illusory, and the motivation strikes me as a combination of cost-saving, enhanced cash flows, and wanting to make clear that being on benefits should involve hardship. Instead, recipients are immediately plunged into further debt and inevitably struggle mightily to survive.

There are undoubtedly many people who have benefited from the Universal Credit system, and many of the Job Centre staff play important roles in supporting and encouraging their clients. But many claimants also feel that they are forced to jump through hoops for the sake of it, fill out pointless job applications for positions that do not match their qualifications, and take inappropriate low-paid, temporary work just to avoid debilitating sanctions. One Conservative Party MP with whom I spoke criticized DWP for adopting a military-style command and control approach rather than seeking to empower their clients and instill confidence.

When claimants contest assessments that they consider to be wrong, there is a clear sense that the Orwellian named anonymous 'decision-maker' rarely varies the approach. Similarly the requirement that before appealing a disability assessment to a tribunal a phase of mandatory reconsideration must take place is considered by many observers to be little more than a delaying tactic.

One of the key features of Universal Credit involves the imposition of draconian sanctions, even for infringements that seem minor. Endless anecdotal evidence was presented to the Special Rapporteur to illustrate the harsh and arbitrary nature of some of the sanctions, as well as the devastating effects that resulted from being completely shut out of the benefits system for weeks or months at a time. As the system grows older, some penalties will soon be measured in years.

Recent statistics indicate dramatic fluctuations in sanctioning, perhaps reflecting different instructions from on high. For unemployed people, between 6% and 8% are subjected to sanctions, and 31% of sanctions were for a period exceeding three months, and one in eight were over six months. A recent book characterised the sanctions as being cruel, inhuman and degrading, and the Inquiry undertaken by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities found "evidence of grave and systematic violation of the rights of persons with disabilities," partly on the basis of the sanctions regime.

The government says it is taking an experimental "test and learn" approach to Universal Credit, but there seems to be an unacknowledged risk that this approach could treat vulnerable people like guinea pigs and wreak havoc in real peoples' lives. "Test and learn" cannot be a decade-long excuse for failing to properly design a system that is meant to guarantee the social security of so many, and it does not remedy the damage done to those who were thrown into debt or out of their houses, or made to rely on food banks before the improvements kicked in.

A Digital Welfare State

Relatively unnoticed amidst the turmoil of Brexit, the UK government announced the 'total transformation' of government in 2017. The 2017 Government Transformation Strategy was presented as "the most ambitious programme of change of any government anywhere in the world." Not only will government services become 'digital by default,' as was first announced in 2012, but the inner workings of government itself will be transformed in a push for automation aided by data science and artificial intelligence.

There are few places in government where these developments are more tangible than in the benefit system. We are witnessing the gradual disappearance of the postwar British welfare state behind a webpage and an algorithm. In its place, a digital welfare state is emerging. The impact on the human rights of the most vulnerable in the UK will be immense.

Universal Credit as a Digital by Default Service

The UK government made Universal Credit the first major government service that is 'digital by default.' This means that an entitlement claim is made online and that the beneficiary then interacts with authorities mainly through an online portal. One wonders why some of the most vulnerable and those with poor digital literacy had to go first in what amounts to a nationwide digital experiment.

From the outset, the belief within DWP has been that the overwhelming majority of Universal Credit claimants are online and digitally skilled, and confident enough to claim and maintain benefits digitally. Despite contrary indications from some officials, the relevant documents show DWP's assumption that most people are at ease and competent online. Overall rollout of broadband internet in the UK may be high, but those figures hide the fact that many poorer and more vulnerable household are effectively offline and without digital skills. According to 2017 Ofcom figures, only 47% of those on low income use broadband internet at home. Only 42% of those who are unemployed and 43% of those on low income do their banking online. According to the Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2018, 21% of the UK population does not have five basic digital skills and 16% of the population is not able to fill out an online application form. Universal Credit has built a digital barrier that effectively obstructs many individuals' access to their entitlements. Women, older people, people who do not speak English and the disabled are more likely to be unable to overcome this hurdle.

The reality is that digital assistance has been outsourced to public libraries and civil society organisations. Public libraries are on the frontline of helping the digitally excluded and digitally illiterate who wish to claim their right to Universal Credit. While library budgets have been severely cut across the country, they still have to deal with an influx of Universal Credit claimants who arrive at the library, often in a panic, to get help claiming benefits online. In Newcastle alone, the first city where 'full service' Universal Credit was rolled out in May 2016, the City Library has digitally assisted nearly 2,000 customers between August 2017 and September 2018. Around one third of new Universal Credit claims fail in the application process and never reach the payment stage. Many of those cases may be related to the design of the DWP system.

The Dismantling of the Broader Social Safety Net

Before describing the ways in which the overall social safety net is being systematically dismantled, it is important to acknowledge some of the positive developments of which I was informed by the Government. The latest budget introduced several positive changes to Universal Credit, including a welcome increase in work allowances, as a consequence of which an estimated 2.4 million households will be better off next year to the tune of £630. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that 200,000 people will move out of poverty as a result of this change. By the same token, such improvements will be partly offset by the continuing freeze on benefits combined with the effect of inflation. The government has also taken steps to prioritise important social care issues through the launch of the government's first loneliness strategy and the appointment of a Minister for suicide prevention.

Benefit reductions and limits

Significant reductions in the amount of and eligibility for important forms of support have undermined the capacity of benefits to loosen the grip of poverty. Capping benefit amounts to working-age households, limiting support to two children per family, reducing the Housing Benefit for under-occupied social housing, and reducing the value of a wide range of benefits, have all made it much harder for people to make ends meet.

While the Government has commendably sought to protect the pension entitlements of older people, especially by introducing in 2010 a 'triple lock' to ensure that annual pension levels rise in accordance with whichever is highest among the rate of inflation, average earnings, or 2.5%. This helped to reduce poverty among pensioners, although the recent picture is less positive.

But the triple lock contrasts dramatically with the freeze on benefit rates for working age people since 2016. Poor households typically spend a higher proportion of their income on consumer goods than wealthy households and already often struggle to put food on the table after bills are paid. Despite this, the Government froze benefit rates in 2016, thus enabling continuing inflation to systematically reduce the value of the benefits. Poor families have thus had to do more with less as the price of goods has gone up and the value of their income has declined. Households are expected to have to cope with a reduction of £4.4 billion in 2019/20 alone. This year, when the Chancellor could have used the windfall he received from the Office for Budget Responsibility to end the benefit freeze a year earlier than planned, he instead chose to change income tax thresholds in a way that will help those better off and will do nothing to move the needle on poverty.

Local authorities' cuts

In 2010, the Government pledged to radically reform public services by cutting funding to local authorities in England. This has had tremendous implications for local authorities, which are obligated to balance their books and whose revenue raising powers are limited. According to the National Audit Office, local governments in England have seen a 49% real-terms reduction in Government funding from 2010-11 to 2017-18 alongside a rise in demand for key social services.

As a result, they have transferred a greater share of service costs to users who are often the least able to pay. They have cut spending on services by 19% and focused their spending on statutorily mandatory adult social care and child protection services. The leader of one city council told me local governments have cut preventative, proactive services and then had to cope with a rise in crisis intervention – which can in fact be much more costly than preventative services.

More than 500 children's centres closed between 2010 and 2018, and between 2010 and 2016 more than 340 libraries closed and 8,000 library jobs were lost. Anyone can rely on public services like the library, but they are of particular significance to those living in poverty who may need to access a computer or a safe community space. I spoke with a group of young people from London who made it clear how valuable a community centre is as a safe space in a crowded city where people are squeezed by an immensely challenging housing market, and where being stuck out on the street could lead to crime and gang life.

Local welfare funds, a vital resource for people on the brink of crisis, have been another casualty of austerity. Many local governments in England have closed or cut their Local Welfare Assistance Schemes, leaving vulnerable people and those facing emergencies without anywhere to turn. At least 28 authorities have shuttered their local welfare funds and councils reported reducing their related expenditures by 72.5% between 2013 and 2018. From 2015 to 2018, the proportion of destitute people who reported receiving in-kind help from local welfare funds dropped sharply by 28%. The collapse of this resource for people who face sudden hardship has apparently been of no concern to the government, which decentralised responsibility for the funds and does not collect any information on what has become of them.

Cuts in other services

As I toured the country, I was told time and again about important public services being pared down, the loss of institutions that would have previously protected vulnerable people, social care services that are at a breaking point, and local government and devolved administrations stretched far too thin. The voluntary sector has done an admirable job of picking up the slack for those government functions that have been cut or de facto outsourced. One pastor told me that because the government has cut services to the bone, his church is providing meals paid for by church members. But that work is not an adequate substitute for the government's obligations. Food banks cannot step in to do the government's job, and teachers — who very well may be relying on food banks themselves — shouldn't be responsible for ensuring their students have clean clothes and food to eat.

Measuring and Monitoring Poverty

It became clear from my many meetings and encounters in the UK that people want to work, and are taking hard, low paying, and insecure jobs in order to put food on the table. They want to contribute to their society and communities, support their families, live in safe, affordable housing, and take control over their lives. A just and compassionate UK can ensure these people are able to escape the restrictions of poverty. But a social safety net is not just for people already in poverty. It is equally important for a very large number of people whose margin of error is small and for whom a single crisis can lead to disaster. Many of the people I heard from ended up struggling to overcome financial hardship because of a surprise health condition, a divorce, or a child's disability. More and more working people are trapped in poverty by a rising tide of low pay, debt, and high living costs, and a majority of the UK population will use some form of benefits over an 18-year period.

To address poverty systematically and effectively it is essential to know its extent and character. Yet the United Kingdom does not have an official measure of poverty. It produces four different measures of people who live on "below average income." This allows it to pick and choose which numbers to use and to claim that "absolute poverty" is falling. Seen in context, however, other measures show that progress in reducing poverty has flat lined, child poverty is rising, and poverty is projected to rise in the coming years. The bipartisan Social Metrics Commission's New Poverty Measure represents an attempt to create a single comprehensive measure of poverty, and these are the numbers I reference here unless otherwise noted. I would urge the Government to respond to the Commission and adopt its approach, which has received an impressive degree of cross-party support.

The government told me that there are 3.3 million more people in work than in 2010, that so called "absolute poverty" is falling, and that the social support system is working. An elected official added that there is no extreme poverty in the UK and nothing like the levels of destitution seen in other countries.

But there is a striking and almost complete disconnect between what I heard from the government and what I consistently heard from many people directly, across the country. People I spoke with told me they have to choose between eating and heating their homes, or eating and feeding their children. One person said, "I would rather feed my kids than pay my rent, but that could get us all kicked out." Children are showing up at school with empty stomachs, and schools are collecting food on an ad hoc basis and sending it home because teachers know that their students will otherwise go hungry. Many families are living paycheque to paycheque. And 2.5 million people in the UK survive with incomes no more than 10% above the poverty line. They are thus just one crisis away from falling into poverty through no fault of their own.

I heard story after story from people who considered and even attempted suicide, and spoke with multiple organisations that have instituted suicide prevention training for frontline staff in recent years. One person said, "The cumulative impact of successive cuts has been devastating. People are coming to me because they are suicidal, they have turned to sex work, they can't live with themselves." These aren't just anecdotes. They are reflected in the numbers. In England, homelessness is up 60% since 2010, rough sleeping is up 134%. There are 1.2 million people on the social housing waiting list, but less than 6,000 homes were built last year. Food bank use is up almost four-fold since 2012, and there are now about 2,000 food banks in the UK, up from just 29 at the height of the financial crisis. Not only does the government not measure food poverty, but a Minister dismissed the significance of food bank use as being only occasional and noted that food banks exist in many other western countries. The clear implication was that their rapid growth in the UK should not be seen as cause for concern, let alone for government action.

Employment as the Cure-All for Poverty

The government says work is the solution to poverty and points to record employment rates as evidence that the country is going in the right direction. But being in employment does not magically overcome poverty. In-work poverty is increasingly common and almost 60% of those in poverty in the UK are in families where someone works. There are 2.8 million people living in poverty in families where all adults work full time. Families with two parents working full time at the national minimum wage are still 11% short of the income needed to raise a child. One person told me "I know people who are working five jobs to make the national minimum wage, which isn't a living wage."

Low wages, insecure jobs, and zero hour contracts mean that even at record unemployment there are still 14 million people in poverty. Government Ministers emphasised that only 3% of the workforce on zero hours contracts, with no benefits or security. But that amounts to almost one million workers, and a great many of them will be among the most vulnerable members of society. And the Equalities and Human Rights Commission found that 10% of workers over 16 are in insecure employment. Jobs aren't even a guarantee against people needing food banks. The Trussell Trust told me that one in six people referred to their food banks are in work. One pastor said "The majority of people using our food bank are in work.... Nurses and teachers are accessing food banks."

The Hardest Hit

The costs of austerity have fallen disproportionately upon the poor, women, racial and ethnic minorities, children, single parents, and people with disabilities. The changes to taxes and benefits since 2010 have been highly regressive, and the policies have taken the highest toll on those least able to bear it. The government says everyone's hard work has paid off, but according to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, while the bottom 20% of earners will have lost on average 10% of their income by 2021/22 as a result of these changes, top earners have actually come out ahead. According to 2017 research by the Runnymede Trust and Women's Budget Group, as a result of changes to taxes, benefits, and public spending from 2010 through 2020, Black and Asian households in the lowest fifth of incomes will experience largest average drop in living standards, about 20%.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission forecasts that another 1.5 million more children will fall into poverty between 2010 and 2021/22 as a result of the changes to benefits and taxes, a 10% increase from 31% to 41%. According to the Social Metrics Commission, almost a third of children in the UK live in poverty. According to Child Poverty Action Group, the child benefit will have lost 23% of its real value between 2010 and 2020, due to sub-inflationary uprating and the current freeze. Because of changes to benefits and taxes, the Equality and Human Rights Commission projects the poverty rate for children in single parent households to jump to a shocking 62% by 2021/22.

Nearly half of those in poverty, 6.9 million people, are from families in which someone has a disability. People with disabilities are more likely to be in poverty, and are more likely to be unemployed, in insecure employment, or economically inactive. They have also been some of the hardest hit from austerity measures. As a result of changes to benefits and taxes since 2010, some families with disabilities are projected to lose £11,000 on average by 2021/22, more than 30% of their annual net income. People with disabilities told me again and again about benefits assessments that were superficial and dismissive, and that led to findings that contradicted the advice of their doctor.

Destitution is built into the asylum system. Asylum seekers are banned from working and limited to a derisory level of support that guarantees they will live in poverty. The government promotes work as the solution to poverty, yet refuses to allow this particular group to work. While asylum seekers receive some basic supports such as housing, they are left to make do with an inadequate, poverty-level income of around £5 a day. For those who have no recourse to public funds as a result of their immigration status, the situation can be particularly difficult; such individuals face an increased risk of exploitation and enjoy restricted access to educational opportunities.

Poverty in rural areas is particularly harsh. Rural dwellers are particularly impacted by cuts to transportation and public services, are at a higher risk of loneliness and isolation, and often face higher fuel costs. Without adequate access to transportation, people can't get to work even when they are able to get a job. One person told me that it was easier for her to go to find a job by going to another city and staying with friends there than it would have been to find a job at home without public transportation.

Conclusion

The experience of the United Kingdom, especially since 2010, underscores the conclusion that poverty is a political choice. Austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so. Resources were available to the Treasury at the last budget that could have transformed the situation of millions of people living in poverty, but the political choice was made to fund tax cuts for the wealthy instead.

It was a British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, who memorably claimed that without a social contract, life outside society would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." The risk is that if current policies do not change, this is the direction in which low-income earners and the poor are headed. Loneliness rates have soared in recent years and life expectancy rates have stalled in the United Kingdom, with the latest statistics showing a sharp drop in the annual improvement that has been experienced every year since the records began, and an actual drop for certain groups.

The compassion and mutual concern that has long been part of the British tradition has been outsourced. At the same time many of the public places and institutions that previously brought communities together, such as libraries, community and recreation centres, and public parks, have been steadily dismantled or undermined. In its fiscal analyses, the Treasury and the Government constantly repeat the refrain that fiscal policy must "avoid burdening the next generation." The message is that the debt burden must be paid off now. The problem is that the next generation's prospects are already being grievously undermined by the systematic dismantling of social protection policies since 2010.

The negotiations surrounding Brexit present an opportunity to take stock of the current situation and re-imagine what this country should represent and how it protects its people. The legislative recognition of social rights should be a central part of that re-imagining. And social inclusion, rather than increasing marginalisation of the working poor and those unable to work, should be the guiding principle of social policy.

The UK should introduce a single measure of poverty and measure food security.

The government should initiate an expert assessment of the cumulative impact of tax and spending decisions since 2010 and prioritise the reversal of particularly regressive measures, including the benefit freeze, the two-child limit, the benefit cap, and the reduction of the housing benefit for under-occupied social rented housing.

It should ensure local governments have the funds needed to tackle poverty at the community level, and take varying needs and tax bases into account in the ongoing Fair Funding Review.

The Department of Work and Pensions should conduct an independent review of the effectiveness of reforms to welfare conditionality and sanctions introduced since 2012, and should immediately instruct its staff to explore more constructive and less punitive approaches to encouraging compliance.

The five week delay in receiving benefits under Universal Credit should be eliminated, separate payments should be made to different household members, and weekly or fortnightly payments should be facilitated.

Transport, especially in rural areas, should be considered an essential service, equivalent to water and electricity, and the government should regulate the sector to the extent necessary to ensure that people living in rural areas are adequately served. Abandoning people to the private market in relation to a service that affects every dimension of their basic well-being is incompatible with human rights requirements.

As the country moves toward Brexit, the Government should adopt policies designed to ensure that the brunt of the resulting economic burden is not borne by its most vulnerable citizens.

The above is an abridged version of the report. Download the full report from the UN Human Rights website:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23881&LangID=E>

More info: <https://ctbi.org.uk/united-nations-special-rapporteur-report-uk-poverty>

- *The Times* reports that pupils at Woodchurch High School in Birkenhead on Merseyside won't be allowed to wear designer brands after the Christmas break. "Poverty-proofing" is a growing movement among schools, the paper adds. Initiatives include banning expensive pencil cases and not inviting primary pupils to talk about what they did at the weekend because it makes those who did nothing feel unhappy.

- **Church Action on Poverty Sunday** this year is on 3 March, marked as Transfiguration Sunday in many churches. We invite you to look at things in a different light, just as the disciples did. Listen to stories of how Church Action on Poverty's work transforms lives and communities. Commit your church to listen more deeply to people who have been swept to the edges of society by poverty. Explore new perspectives on familiar Bible stories. Hold a collection or soup lunch – raise funds to make voices heard, tell stories and call for action. Use our worship materials to reflect and pray for change.

Please register now to be part of Church Action on Poverty Sunday. You'll get a free pack of worship materials and fundraising ideas. We'll be in touch later with videos, sermon notes and other resources. **Click here to download your fundraising and worship pack now!** <https://churchpoverty.e-activist.com/page/31829/subscribe/1?locale=en-GB>

We must not seek the child Jesus in the pretty figures of our Christmas crib. We must seek him among the undernourished children who have gone to bed tonight without eating, among the poor who will sleep covered with newspapers in the doorway.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, Christmas 1979

CATHOLIC BISHOPS CALL FOR COMMON ACTION ON HOUSING CRISIS IN NEW REPORTS

Jo Siedlecka 21 November 2018

Rt Rev Terence Drainey, Bishop of Middlesbrough and Chair of Caritas Social Action Network, launched a major new report: ***Abide in Me*** yesterday, at the Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) annual reception in the Houses of Parliament yesterday, hosted by Lord Browne. Among the attendees was the Archbishop of Southwark Most Rev Peter Smith, the Bishop of Salford Rt Rev John Arnold, together with MPs and representatives from many organisations and dioceses that are part of CSAN.

The report is the result of a pioneering collaboration between the national team of CSAN and the ecumenical Centre for Theology and Community, with its strong local connections in East London. *Abide in Me* addresses the underlying causes of the crisis, through fresh theological reflection, and in conversation with people living in different housing situations, charities and experts in various fields. Among the causes of the current crisis highlighted are the common treatment of housing and land as financial assets, and strong links between modern housing development and increased social isolation. The report emphasises the need for the Government and all citizens to address the concentration of the power for change in the state and markets. A more sustainable approach would favour more authentic community participation in decisions that affect the shape of the places we live in.

The report urges co-ordinated action on housing challenges in England and Wales from 2018-30, at local, regional and national levels in the social mission of the Church. The twelve-year timescale is aligned with international Catholic Church engagement on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It reflects the need for a long-term approach to deep social and economic roots of the crisis.

In his address, Bishop Drainey said: "For Christians, a crisis is an opportunity. It nudges us to renew our mission in our own time and place, to be confident in entering on what might be a long haul, and to learn to love with fewer conditions. In that light, we are compelled to ask ourselves: 'What more can Catholic social thought and action contribute on housing?' With the bishops' support, CSAN's national team and the ecumenical Centre for Theology and Community (CTC) have been addressing that question together in some depth.

Bishop Drainey called on politicians to use their influence in reforming housing, planning and land regulation, to be at the service of promoting human dignity, participation and solidarity in communities, for the long term. He encouraged politicians to give greater preference to housing developments that are community-owned and led, and to tackle practices in public sector contracting that were reducing the agency of local people: "Charities that have deep social connections in local neighbourhoods have been increasingly forced to compete for public funds, often for short-term payments with more strings attached, and against larger, remote organisations. This further erodes trust and participation in communities, and the priority of labour over capital. I encourage you to take further measures that support local enterprise and the long-term future of local amenities."

Canon Dr Angus Ritchie from the CTC said usually it is people with a voice that speak up for the homeless. Too often poor people have no voice. But this new project is giving homeless people a chance to speak. Dr Ritchie pointed out that Pope Francis and Pope Benedict have both said on many occasions that it is in our encounters with the poor that we meet God. Maria Nyman, incoming CEO of Caritas Europa also welcomed the report. Praising the work of CSAN she said she hoped all the dioceses of England and Wales would join in the next few years.

In conjunction with the report, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have issued an open letter to senior leaders in Catholic charities and related institutions. The bishops encourage these leaders to work together, making renewed action on the housing crisis in these parts of the UK a shared priority within the Church's social mission.

While there have been earlier reports on homelessness from the Bishops' Conference, *Abide in Me* is believed to be the first dedicated mainly to housing, planning and land.

A second report was also launched yesterday. ***Realities are Greater than Ideas*** is a new CTC report on Evangelisation, Catholicism and Community Organising. Written by Dunstan Rodrigues, with essays by Prof Anna Rowlands and CTC Director Angus Ritchie, it combines stories from churches and chaplaincies with reflection on Catholic social teaching.

The report was funded by CSAN and the Catholic Diocese of Brentwood. CSAN Chief Executive Phil McCarthy welcomed the report as "a timely contribution to national debates on what it means to be a 'Church of the poor', and how Catholics can best address powerful systems that can increase or reduce division in our society." He said that CSAN "have been pleased to support CTC in reflecting on how a process of community organising, in this case with Citizens UK, can shape Christians who, as Pope Francis yearns, are on the streets and not clinging to their own security."

Steve Webb, Development Director in the Diocese of Brentwood said: "The Church sets before the world the ideal of a civilisation of love and this report will help many to turn the ideal into a local reality. Working together as a Catholic community in the wider community will achieve more than acting alone. As we seek to discover new ways to evangelise our diocese, we express our gratitude to the authors for providing materials that will foster (one to one) conversation and lead to action for the common good."

LINKS

Abide in Me can be downloaded from CSAN's website - www.csan.org.uk

Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) - www.csan.org.uk/about-csan/

Centre for Theology and Community (CTC) - www.theology-centre.org

Realities are Greater than Ideas can be downloaded from -

www.theology-centre.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Realities-are-Greater-than-Ideas.pdf

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/36041>

STUFFING SHOE BOXES FOR THE WORLD'S POOR? MAYBE YOU SHOULD RECONSIDER ...

Blake Tommey 29 March 2017

For many churches, *Operation Christmas Child* is a well-established — and easy — expression of their compassion for the poor. Some congregations, however, are discovering better ways to engage the world's impoverished.

On a balmy July afternoon in East Africa, Joelle McNamara stood with her African neighbours in puzzled anticipation. A shipment of shoeboxes from *Operation Christmas Child* had arrived for a cluster of local children. Families, pastors and McNamara herself gathered for the yuletide unveiling of toys, trinkets and other Christmas gifts that American churches had packed for the children. As a young boy pried open his shoebox, a plastic Slinky emerged. He held it in front of his bewildered eyes as if to ponder all the ways that the coloured spring could be fun or amusing. He had no clue. Recognising the boy's confusion, a local pastor swooped in to provide aid and discover the proper use of a Slinky. Both pastor and child tinkered for a moment until they reached a verdict. Swinging it clumsily around his neck and fastening it under his chin, the pastor let out an amused chuckle at his new piece of American jewelry, courtesy of *Operation Christmas Child*.

"Yes, the result is a little bit comically terrible," says McNamara, founder of the Kenya-based development organization Badala. Since her first visit to East Africa as a teenager, McNamara says she has undergone a journey of understanding what God's generosity can and must look like among those living in poverty. Her own dreams of feeding the poor and saving developing countries from poverty slowly fell apart as she encountered people who weren't looking for food or toys, but rather sustainable employment and the means to utilise their own power and giftedness to support their families.

The Samaritan's Purse project *Operation Christmas Child*, an effort in which 500,000 volunteers invest each year, is a large-scale expression of generosity that has failed to listen and learn what truly gives life to people in need, she says. "Being generous requires us to dedicate profound thought to what the person receiving our generosity actually needs," McNamara says. "So often, the church makes generosity synonymous with the free giving of stuff, but it's not. I've seen Westerners come in and drop off a whole bunch of stuff — toys, free food, tons of clothes. Typically it's not useful, they're paying way too much for overseas shipping and suddenly the local food or clothing vendors don't make their living for the week, and those are important jobs for struggling communities."

In East Africa, McNamara witnessed firsthand the ineffective and often toxic charity performed by many Western churches and aid organisations. She subsequently founded Badala as a means for women across the world to sell their own handmade jewelry and housewares to support their families. If the church desires to help those living in poverty and share God's love, she says, it must recognise a deeper "yes" as it says "no" to problematic and unjust forms of generosity.

"In terms of global poverty, give gifts that provide employment to people who can then provide Christmas for their own families," McNamara says. "We're made in the image of a Creator, and when we provide someone the opportunity to create a product and a living, it's so powerful and healing. I've seen so many switches go off as these women realise how they were made and that they are meant for more. It may sound insane to say that God's love is experienced through employment, but it is. Give gifts that provide employment and invest in education — that is what gives power to people."

Since charity workers David and Gill Cooke created *Operation Christmas Child* in 1990, the project has pervaded the local church and its allocation of mission resources. For many churches, both conservative and progressive, each November sees the gathering from entire congregations, children's ministries, youth groups and individual donors to pack shoeboxes full of toys, school supplies, personal items and other small gifts to be shipped to children in need across the world. Yet as those same congregations begin to explore and understand the fundamental flaws in even the most big-hearted giving of time and resources, they increasingly arrive at nuanced questions and conflicts about the nature of mission in the local church.

Sharlande Sledge, associate pastor of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, says the church's conflicted participation in OCC took a central place within their recent "compassionate conversations," one of which led the church to welcome and affirm the LGBTQ community. On one hand, Sledge admits, OCC offers a highly tactile experience, especially for children and families as they gather to enjoy community as well as contribute to the mission of OCC. Participants not only enjoy the ease and joy of shopping for other children, but also channeling the thrilling benevolence with which many Americans give Christmas gifts.

In recent years, however, enthusiasm for OCC has waned at Lake Shore and congregants are seeking alternatives, Sledge says, not only as OCC's relief efforts increasingly come under fire but as Samaritan's Purse president Franklin Graham spews ever more hateful rhetoric about immigrants and Muslims. "For more and more people in our church, the disconnect between the leader and the projects doesn't make sense. In these chaotic times, we long for calm voices to guide us in purposeful mission with words and actions that reflect each other — two integrated parts of the whole. The gospel, as we understand it and try to practice it, is a gospel of welcome and justice, mercy and love. At Lake Shore, we never lack for good, creative opportunities to share our gifts. In this world of so many needs, we simply call on God's wisdom to guide us toward just and compassionate choices."

At First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Ga., those same conversations have led the congregation away from more toxic forms of charity toward creative opportunities to empower those living in poverty, says missions minister Jody Long. FBCC set up a Christmas toy shop to offer local parents the opportunity to shop for their families at a greatly reduced cost, eliminating the shame that often accompanies free giving. Each year at Christmas, FBCC holds a toy drive in which congregants and community members purchase new toys to donate to the toy shop. The church then marks down each toy by 85 to 90 percent so that families on low and fixed incomes can purchase gifts for their children. Long says the toy shop provides a way to build humanising relationships and empower people with their own autonomy and income. "It can dehumanise people when they're always given everything," Long says. "If we want to focus on providing Christmas gifts, we can at least allow people to access them with some sense of pride and buy-in to the system. We want to allow parents and families to participate in the process because there is a dignity that is gained by a parent being able to purchase their child's gifts at Christmas as opposed to just another handout."

Ultimately, as churches and faith communities undergo the delicate work of divesting from initiatives such as *Operation Christmas Child* and moving toward more effective development work, they quickly encounter the most deep-seated questions about the role of the church and how it engages with God's mission.

Where do we go from here? How does the church offer real, sustainable aid to those living in poverty? Can congregations foster justice with financial giving alone or is full immersion required? What deeper work is God up to in the world and how can we join? Melissa Browning, Assistant Professor of Contextual Ministry at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology, says that giving gifts, food or other goods through organisations like *Operation Christmas Child* is often an easy answer to the ways that global poverty tugs on one's sense of compassion. Whether churches create their own projects, volunteer or simply give financial support to an organisation or individual, the true goal is to foster real economic development and empower people to emerge from poverty, explains Browning, who also is consultant for Focused Community Strategies.

"Giving gifts is a very easy, cathartic answer and more often a way to ease our conscience than actually help someone with a development problem," Browning says. "We can decide to buy a Christmas gift for a kid, and in that act of giving, we truly care about poverty and we care about another person's situation. But as soon as we've wrapped that gift and sent it, we're done and it doesn't help them get out of poverty. If I give someone a bag of food or a Christmas gift, as soon as that bag of food or Christmas gift is gone, they're still in the same situation. But when we begin to ask what better gift we can give instead, that's where real development work comes in."

No matter how a congregation engages its resources — full immersion or financial giving — creating good mission partnerships comes down to two questions, Browning says: does the cause or organisation foster real economic development in the lives of people living in poverty and can they prove it? The best news, she adds, is that the church has diverse ways of participating in authentic economic development in poor communities, including direct giving.

If migrating from toxic charities means exploring economic development work in adjacent cities and neighbourhoods, the church is almost guaranteed to find just and sustainable mission partnerships right around the corner, says Stephen Weir, executive director of Church Hill Activities and Tutoring. Since 2007, CHAT has invested in the youth in the East End of Richmond, Va., and equipped them with the education, support and relationships to emerge from poverty and destructive environments.

While the work of engaging children and families living in poverty may often sound romantic and even highly productive, Weir says, the church's most vital task is to reconcile with the fact that engaging poverty will neither feel good nor produce big results. "When you drop that Christmas present into the box at church, it feels really good, but when you really deal with the hard thing about poverty, it won't. Your value comes when you begin to give the things that are harder to give, like sitting down with a kid who never learned how to read because his public school sucks. You can solve that by working with him, by starting a private school that works better or by working with the public schools to make them better, but that's a long, hard process. You're going to feel like you're not making any progress and maybe you won't, but you'll finally be engaging poverty."

In the end, when churches and faith communities reconcile with the fact that engaging poverty will be extremely difficult and possibly not produce any visible results, Weir says, they must finally be willing to leave their bubble, especially the one created by *Operation Christmas Child* and charity projects like it. If they can leave that bubble, Weir added, they can always find people and organisations that are truly engaging poverty and building relationships that empower communities in need.

<https://baptistnews.com/article/stuffing-shoe-boxes-for-the-worlds-poor-maybe-you-should-reconsider/#.W9F4CuukqK3>

HOLY SEE AT UN URGES RATIFICATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS BAN TREATY

27 October 2018: In a week in which President Trump confirmed that he is leaving the nuclear arms control treaty with Russia, signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, the Vatican at the UN once more expressed grave concern over the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of the use of nuclear weapons, and called on all governments of states who adopted the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) to sign and ratify it.

Speaking on behalf of Archbishop Bernadito Auza, the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the UN in New York, Second Counsellor, Father David Charters made the call in an address on Monday at a UN General Assembly discussion on nuclear disarmament.

The TPNW, or the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, that prohibits the use, threat of use, development, testing, production, manufacturing and possession of nuclear weapons, will enter into force when 50 states have signed and ratified it. Fr Charters warned that a nuclear war or even a limited use of nuclear weapons would be a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions, and would kill untold numbers of people and cause tremendous environmental damage and famine. The Holy See official pointed out that the continued existence of over 14,000 nuclear weapons held by a handful of countries is one of the greatest moral challenges of our time. Fr Charters said that the Catholic Church has been opposing nuclear weapons since 1943.

St John XXIII called for its ban in his encyclical *Peace on Earth* and the later popes have consistently called for the "abolition of these evil instruments of warfare that create both a false sense of security and foster distrust and disharmony".

Fr Charters pointed out that the Second Vatican Council condemned nuclear arms race as "an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one that injures the poor to an intolerable degree." Fr Charters noted that maintenance of nuclear weapons continues to siphon off immense resources that could be devoted, among other things, to the implementation and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

The Holy See the concern of Pope Francis according to whom "nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence." <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/35887>

CAFOD SUPPORTS WORLDWIDE CALL FROM CATHOLIC BISHOPS ON CLIMATE ACTION

27 October 2018: CAFOD has welcomed calls for immediate and urgent action from a worldwide group of Catholic Church leaders (26 October 2018) on climate change.

A statement CAFOD said: 'This group of eminent church leaders think that now is the time for world government leaders to take ambitious and urgent action to tackle the devastating effects of the climate change crisis. These world leaders could signal their intent through the upcoming international climate COP24 summit in Katowice, Poland, by agreeing to keep global temperatures rises down to 1.5 degrees and set a net zero carbon emissions target before 2050.'

Neil Thorns, Director of Advocacy, CAFOD and Bishop John Arnold, Chair of Trustees, CAFOD, commented: "It is time for the leaders of the world to heed and act on the words of Pope Francis and the Catholic Church community that we must take better care of our planet so that it has a sustainable and vibrant future. Governments, businesses, communities and people should look to changing the direction of their policies and lifestyles which is more harmonious with the ecology of the world.

"Poorer countries are daily on the frontline of the climate crisis and they cannot be left to battle this on their own. We must act right now to support them by turning away from the fossil fuels industry, consuming less and living more simply."

See also: Church worldwide calls for ambitious and urgent climate action www.indcatholicnews.com/news/35883

BISHOP JOHN ARNOLD CALLS FOR LIFESTYLE CHANGES TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

Source: CCN 7 November 2018

Last month the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a special report on the expected impacts of an increase in 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, with an urgent call to action.

Bishop John Arnold writes:

The report is clear that we are seeing the consequences of a warming world (having already increased 1°C), resulting in more extreme weather, rising sea levels, diminishing sea ice and the loss of coral reefs, among other changes. In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis laments that our Mother Earth "now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her (2)."

Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si'*: "Climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all (23)." We have a duty to recognise the need for changes in lifestyle, production and consumption. I'm proud to say that 20 Catholic Dioceses in England and Wales have already made the switch to green energy, that 45 Live Simply Awards have now been presented, and that we recently launched a new film-based resource called *Global Healing* to help parishes, groups and individuals respond to the damage being done to our planet.

According to the IPCC "unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" are required if we are to keep warming below 1.5°C, and that this change can go "hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society."

In 2015 the 'Paris Agreement' brought world nations together in agreement that we need to keep the global average temperature rise to well below 2°C and endeavour to keep it below 1.5°C. The IPCC report explores the impacts of both scenarios, and it is clear that the difference between the two is substantial. For example, by 2100 we would have 10cm higher sea level rise at 2°C than 1.5°C.

Small Island Developing States are the most vulnerable to these effects, despite being amongst the least to blame for climate change, with a very real danger that whole communities will be displaced. Coral reefs are expected to decline by 70-90% if we limit warming to 1.5°C, but virtually disappear if we reach 2°C. According to the World Wildlife Fund, more than 450 million people live within 60 kilometres of coral reefs, with the majority directly or indirectly deriving food and income from them. This human impact is deeply concerning.

Another major report published last week looks at the impact of food production as a major driver of climate change. It shows we cannot ignore the need to move to more plant based diets if we are going to meet emissions targets, alongside a reduction in food waste and some changes in farming practices. A 2013 report on food waste showed that globally we produce about 4 billion metric tonnes of food a year, but that between 30-50% of this never reaches a human stomach. They suggest that in developed countries, 30-50% of food is thrown away by the purchaser. In July, Pope Francis encouraged us to think about these habits. "I am thinking about the many hungry people and how much leftover food we throw away (...) I will give you some advice: speak to your grandparents who lived through the post war period and ask them what they did with the leftovers. Never throw away leftover food (...) This is a piece of advice and also an examination of conscience: what do we do with leftovers at home?"

Pope Francis emphasises that we cannot rely on technology to resolve the issue. We must accept that the problem we face is both social and environmental. To try to fix it without accepting that we need a change in heart and lifestyle, to become 'ecologically converted,' is to avoid dealing with the underlying causes. Just because we buy green energy does not mean we can use as much as we want! "A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes, shows the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment (*Laudato Si'*, 211)."

I highly recommend reading at least summaries of the reports mentioned here and continuing to engage in this very important topic so as to be better able to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/35951>

LINKS: IPCC report: www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/ ***Laudato Si'*:** <http://catholicnews.org.uk/laudato-si>
Global Healing - Our Common Home: www.ourcommonhome.co.uk/

LONDON: CATHOLICS ARRESTED AT CLIMATE CHANGE PROTEST

31 October 2018: Two Catholic campaigners were among 16 people arrested at a climate change protest outside Parliament on Tuesday. The organisers say more than 1,000 people took part in the '**Extinction Rebellion**' demonstration which blocked traffic outside Parliament for over two hours. The protest featured speakers including Green MP Caroline Lucas and writer George Monbiot, calling for the government to take urgent action to tackle climate change.

The protest came just a day after a stark warning from scientists that humanity has wiped out 60% of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles since 1970 - a level of extinction that experts warn threatens the future of human civilisation. Earlier this month a UN report warned that there are only 12 years left to prevent climate catastrophe.

Phil Kingston, a Catholic member of Christian Climate Action member who is in his 80's, lay in the road for several hours before being led away by police. Phil said: "The current path of climate breakdown presents enormous dangers. None of the main political parties are responding with the level of ambition which is essential if we are to respond with the necessary commitment and sacrifice."

Catholic campaigner Nick Cooper was arrested after locking himself to a gate outside the Palace of Westminster. Before his arrest Nick said: "I came today to lend my body to the Extinction Rebellion and defend God's creation which we are crucifying with climate change. We are called to follow God's law even when it means breaking the laws of our time and place."

The "rebellion" has been backed by almost 100 senior academics from across the UK, including Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. In a letter published in *The Guardian* last week they said the failure of politicians to tackle climate breakdown and the growing extinction crisis means "the 'social contract' has been broken ... it is therefore not only our right, but our moral duty to bypass the government's inaction and flagrant dereliction of duty, and to rebel to defend life itself."

The Extinction Rebellion is making the following key demands of the government concerning climate change:

- that the UK declares a state of emergency around climate change;
- that the government takes action to create a zero carbon economy by 2025;
- that we create a national assembly of ordinary people to decide what our zero carbon future will look like.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/35913>

LINKS: Christian Climate Action: <https://christianclimateaction.wordpress.com>

Dr Rowan Williams' letter in The Guardian: www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/26/facts-about-our-ecological-crisis-are-incontrovertible-we-must-take-action

Litany for the Earth: <https://christianclimateaction.wordpress.com/2017/12/03/litany-for-the-earth/>

CLIMATE CHANGE PROTEST: MASS DAY OF ACTION

19 November 2018: Thousands of protesters held a mass day of action on London's bridges over the weekend urging the government to act on climate change. Among them were several members of different denominations from Christian Climate Action: Anglican Ruth Jarman, 55, from Hampshire, Catholic Phil Kingston, 82, Catholic priest Fr Martin Newell, 51, Richard Barnard, 45 and Nick Cooper, 36. At Blackfriars Bridge they formed a human blockade across the road using chains and circular tubing. On Saturday the group prayed as police sawed their tubing and removed them from the road. While this was happening, other protesters gathered around the group singing hymns. The group were arrested.

Phil Kingston, 82-year-old retired Bristol University lecturer explained his motivation for being in the blockade. "I love my grandchildren" he said. "They mean the world to me and the thought of leaving them a broken world breaks my heart. I have to do my bit before it's too late. Us more elderly folk have a lot less to lose than younger people by getting arrested."

Fr Martin Newell, a Catholic priest from Birmingham said his faith compels him to take action "I follow a Christ who cares passionately about the poor, and it is the poorest people of the world who are suffering the effects of climate change. I am called to love my neighbour and today that means pushing the government to take action on climate change. All other avenues of achieving this have failed and so I'm getting involved in non-violent direct action, just as Jesus did when he turned over the tables in the temple."

All the group members took part in actions earlier in the week. Ruth Jarman, was arrested on Thursday for pouring red paint in front of the Brazilian Embassy. She was released on unconditional bail, with her trial scheduled for 2 January 2019. After being released she said: "They say it was criminal damage but I have lawful excuse, because they are causing criminal damage to what us at Christian Climate Action call God's creation. They are destroying it and we have to stand up against that. So we were improving the building because we were making it tell the truth - that this government is taking part in the extinction of God's creation and possibly humanity as well. That's why we did it and I pleaded not guilty because I am not guilty."

Sunday was the sixth day of a fortnight of actions planned in the capital by environmental groups joining together for the 'Extinction Rebellion'. <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/36027>

Letter calling for government action on climate change: www.daviddrewmp.org.uk/news/2018/10/30/david-joins-94-academics-in-letter-calling-for-government-action-on-climate-change-to-safeguard-the-future-of-our-planet-and-generations-to-come

PRAYER OF FRANCISCAN CONVERSION

Living God, where there is waste, let us bring recycling; where there is recycling, let us bring reuse; where there is reuse, let us bring sustainability; where there is sustainability, let us bring justice; where there is justice, let us bring love.

©John Polhill *Wild Goose Publications* (used with permission)

VIEWPOINT: ORDINARY PEOPLE ARE WAKING UP ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

25 November 2018 **Catholic grandfather Phil Kingston, 82, writes:** I am relieved that at last the utter seriousness and urgency of the developing Earth catastrophe is being pushed into public consciousness after decades of avoidance by almost all politicians, mainstream media and of course economic and financial powers. Our political 'representatives' have let us down. With notable exceptions, they lost their credibility by not speaking about this.

To say a little about the last 12 days: not in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I, a former probation officer and educator of probation officers and Local Authority social workers - all of whom work in a context of respect for the law - would within a week be arrested on three occasions and spend considerable time in police cells. Being given the opportunity to meet so many police as human beings has been a gift. Yes, I know that when the chips are down, they have agreed to uphold laws which I regard as fundamentally unjust, such as those which are heavily on the side of corporate and state power. Within that context I want to emphasise their kindness and respect to me and my colleagues. Whenever I had an opportunity to speak about my concern for my grandchildren, I asked if they had children. I was grateful that so many were willing to speak about their concerns regarding climate breakdown. One of reasonably high rank immediately responded with his concern that there are now only 12 years within which to halt his children's descent into disaster.

These connections with those who we may often regard as 'other' are, I am sure, made more possible by our absolute commitment to nonviolence, including verbal nonviolence, to all persons. Hard as it often is to hold on to my belief that politicians and those in business and finance have a humanity exactly like mine, I am determined to do so. I have no illusions about the wrongness of their ideologies and behaviour but I completely refuse to say that they aren't human. If someone like me can change over the years by facing the traumas of life, especially childhood ones, and seeking help for them, I hold hope for all.

I would like to address the rest of this note to other followers of Jesus, though the link in the final paragraph may be surprisingly congruent because it touches our common humanity.

I regard myself as a fortunate man to be alive at the same time as Pope Francis. His arrival has given immense encouragement to those of us in the churches, especially the Catholic Church, who have a vocation to justice, peace and care of the Earth. Prior to this, the experience of many of us was that this vocation was suppressed more than encouraged. It is essential at this critical time of global suffering that this vocation be fully honoured and supported. His writings and speeches about the relationship between the current global economy on the one hand and on the other the destruction of the Earth and the exclusion of the majority of the world's population from what should be the Common Good of everyone, have a clarity and reality which has often not been as forthright in many previous papal documents. See for example his *Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)* especially paras 52 - 75 beginning with 'No to an Economy of Exclusion' and many parts of *Praise be, Our Common Home (Laudato si')*. My experience is that there is often a focus upon the latter document by agencies like CAFOD and Caritas and minimal references to the economic one in *Joy of the Gospel*. Criticising the current economy seems to be avoided as much within the Church as in society generally.

I often regard Pope Francis as a rather lonely man in the Churches of the materially rich countries where his pastoral care and simple living are acclaimed but his economic critique is made invisible by silence. He calls us to extend our focus upon personal sin to fully include structural sin. An aspect of Pope Francis which I value hugely is his explicit seeking of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and his request to all of us to do the same. Our Church so often seems dead to me in comparison with the one in the Acts of the Apostles.

I end by asking if you will read the speech by Pope Francis to the World Gathering of Popular Movements gathered at Santa Cruz in Bolivia in October 2014. I imagine that it will shock many Christians whilst being an affirmation for others. This is the link: http://movimientospopulares.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Documents_ingles_web.pdf

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/36059>

LONDON: MICHAEL GOVE ENDORSES *LAUDATO SI'*, URGES ALL TO BE 'WARRIORS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE'

23 November 2018: **Michael Gove, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, delivered the Theos 2018 Annual Lecture** on environmental justice, stewardship and the moral purpose of government last night. Addressing a 250-strong audience at the Institute of Directors in Pall Mall, London, Mr Gove delivered a detailed and passionate lecture on the UK Government's commitment to tackling climate change. Touching on carbon emissions, food supply, and extinction of various species, Mr Gove quoted St Francis as well as his namesake, the current Pope. Arguing that humans, "have caused environmental damage and deterioration on a dramatic scale in the last century, with pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, habitat erosion, soil depletion, soil depletion and deforestation," Mr Gove suggested many of the answers needed lie within religious traditions. As well as Christianity, he touched on Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Sikh concepts.

Extensively quoting from the Pope's encyclical *Laudato Si'* which calls for Christians to work for social and environmental justice, the Secretary of State endorsed the Holy Father's call for both individual and national action. Mentioning the former Pope, St John Paul II, Mr Gove identified the, "pressure to tread more lightly on the planet," which, "is coming from the young. Inter-generational solidarity is not a 'nice to have' - it's a basic question of justice because the world in which we live belongs also to those who will follow us.

He encouraged people of all faiths and none to be, "not just careful stewards of creation but also warriors for social justice" in seeking to, "protect our natural inheritance and bring a richer life to more." "We believe creation is a gift we must preserve," Mr Gove said, urging the audience, "to combat poverty and restore dignity to the underprivileged at the same time as protecting nature." He ended by stating: "as religious leaders down the ages have urged, we can be better stewards of our earth and plant a harvest for the world."

Read a full transcript here: <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2018/11/22/theos-annual-lecture-with-michael-gove>
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/36052>

A CHRISTMAS PLEDGE

I believe that Christmas is the joyful celebration of the birth of Christ. Therefore, I commit myself to celebrate it in a way that is faithful to its meaning.

Jesus is a radically free person; he came to liberate others. Therefore:

I will examine my motives for celebrating Christmas.

I will not spend money to impress others.

I will avoid doing anything to oblige others to spend on me.

I will not engage in excess of eating, drinking, partying or anything that reduces the freedom of myself or of others.

I will include alternatives to alcohol and cholesterol when I entertain.

Jesus respects all life; he came that we might have life in all its fullness. Therefore:

I will give gifts and do activities only if they enhance life – for myself and for others.

I will avoid gifts made by complicated, energy-consuming processes that excessively pollute the environment.

I will choose gifts that rely on the involvement, energy and ingenuity of the recipient.

I will avoid buying items made by exploited workers whose land and labour are sacrificed.

I will question the source of consumer goods before I buy.

Jesus cares about all people; he came to involve himself with others. Therefore:

I will celebrate Christmas by sharing of myself more than of my property.

I will give gifts of service which involve my time, my work, my spoken and written words, my art, my song, my presence – and other things that are not objects – whenever possible.

I will use some of my time to visit family, friends and those who have less, hurt more and have been forgotten.

HOPE REDISCOVERED by David Atkinson: – BIBLICAL WISDOM FOR AN ANXIOUS WORLD

Published by Ekklesia www.ekklesia.co.uk ISBN 9 780993 294211 (Price £12.99) 31 May 2018 with a forward by Rowan Williams.

Ekklesia says: Among the many causes of anxiety in today's world are global concerns to do with social and economic inequality, the importance of sustainable development, and climate change. These raise human – that is moral and spiritual – questions about who we are, our destiny, how we can be helped to flourish, and what we hope for.

Hope Rediscovered is about being re-oriented in the face of such challenges. Bishop David Atkinson, who has an abiding interest in Christian ethics, pastoral theology and science, has put some key questions to the Gospel of John – a text which says much about human flourishing, and which draws on the Wisdom themes of the Hebrew Bible, about understanding our place in creation, and about practical living. Like his followers, Jesus was beset with conflicts within 'the world'. The first century Christian community, to which the Gospel was addressed, discovered how to live hopefully in the way of Wisdom, energised by God's Spirit. The focus of this timely book is deep, practical wisdom for a troubled world.

• Bishop David Atkinson undertook research in organic chemistry before being ordained. He served as Fellow and Chaplain of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He was a Canon of Southwark Cathedral and Archdeacon of Lewisham before becoming Bishop of Thetford in 2001. He retired in 2009. <http://greenchristian.org.uk/new-book-by-david-atkinson-hope-rediscovered/>

BOOK: ECHO HALL by Virginia Moffatt

Ellen Teague 8 November 2018

The 100th anniversary of the end of World War I is an appropriate time to review a book which explores the impact of war on families, and celebrates the actions of conscientious objectors and anti-war activists. At the beginning there is a quote from war correspondent Robert Fisk, talking about standing on the paving stone in Sarajevo where a gunman fired the fatal shot that sent his father to the trenches of World War I, and saying that "it was as if history was a gigantic echo chamber". Hence the name of the novel *Echo Hall*.

In the book, Echo Hall is a country estate in Shropshire whose resident family have to cope with war, pacifism and family secrets, opening with the first Gulf War of the 1990s, back to World War II and then World War I. Ruth Flint, an anti-war campaigner, newly married and pregnant and having to see her husband off to the first Gulf War, learns about several previous generations, similarly scarred by love, sorrow and war and carrying shadowy secrets. She discovers the stories of her predecessors, Elsie and Rachel, set against the history of World War II and then back to WWI and the suffragette movement.

This anti-war suspense novel is the debut full-length fiction work of Oxford-based writer Virginia Moffatt. It covers several generations of the women of the Flint family, dealing with the separation of couples during war, living with fear and finding normal family life disrupted. Echo Hall is well named, since the mysterious house echoes with the stories of the women who lived there, few of them happily. It is not only the focus on women which is refreshing in the book, it is the accurate reflection of the peace movement - something which author Virginia knows all about. She and her husband Chris Cole have been active as justice and peace campaigners for several decades and have worked with Quakers, for example, whose pacifism is accurately portrayed. In the book, white poppies are worn for Remembrance.

Virginia's saga of a troubled family explores cycles of violence that can tear couples apart, as well as whole societies. Virginia poses a wider question: is conflict always inevitable, or can we find another way? But the novel also covers age-old topics of love and hate, of friendship and betrayal, of prejudices, mistrust and sibling rivalry. I found it compelling despite its sombre tone and loved the setting of a house where malign influences linger, even ghosts. It is a fitting read for this season of Remembrance.

***Echo Hall* by Virginia Moffatt, has been published by crowdfunding publisher Unbound.**

Paperback, 2017, ISBN-10: 1911586866 <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/35963>

CURLEW MOON by Mary Colwell William Collins 272pp Price £16.99

The warbling soft low whistle of the curlew has captured countless souls through the ages, but in the past 20 years in Britain we have lost about 60% of these majestic birds. *Curlew Moon* is a touching protest against this tragedy. Mary Colwell walks 500 miles around the country to find out what is happening and why. She discovers just how much the curlew has inspired rural lives and literature, leaving us to consider the gaping absence its extinction would leave behind.

PRAYING SIMPLY – GETTING TO THE ROOT OF OUR COMMON PROBLEMS

Discovering the intrinsic link between prayer and action – launching on 1.12.18

CLIMATE CHANGE | ECONOMIC INEQUALITY | SPECIES LOSS | GLOBAL POVERTY | WAR AND CONFLICT
| ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION | GENDER INEQUALITY

What if all these global problems are not isolated, but rather are all connected and driven by a common cause? And by changing this common cause, we can transform all these perennial problems into perennial solutions? And what if the answer to this change can be found in the teachings of Jesus, the Desert Fathers, the Christian Mystics and the contemplative tradition found in Christianity? Can changing the way we pray really bring about the healing and transformation of our world?

More info and sign up: prayingsimply.com

LIVERPOOL ARCHDIOCESE GREETINGS CARDS CAMPAIGN

Our greetings card campaigns provide you the chance to show solidarity with people, parishes and schools in The Holy Land, allowing them to feel supported and remembered at Easter and Christmas. Christmas is a time for giving. Here is a small act that will make a big difference. We can easily take Christmas cards for granted but there are other people in other parts of the world who would love to know that someone cares enough to remember them at this time of year.

Download at: <http://jp.liverpoolcatholic.org.uk/2018/11/11/christmas-card-campaign-lists-updated/>

GALLERY OLDHAM

We have three new exhibitions to see this autumn. *'Peace and Plenty? Oldham and the First World War'* has just opened and takes as its starting point the experiences on the home front for the people of Oldham as the 'Great War' drew to a close. The exhibition, co-curated by historians Alan Fowler and Terry Wyke uses Gallery Oldham's extensive collections to explore how Oldham's mills, shops and people all adapted to meet the needs of the war- revisiting everyday lives, losses and achievements. 1918 also saw the first general election in which all men over the age of 21 and women over the age of 30 could vote. To mark this centenary we have borrowed several items relating to women's suffrage including an important and previously unknown letter written by Annie Kenney. The exhibition runs until 12th January.

We are delighted to be a partner in the Asia Triennial Manchester 18, with exhibitions and events taking place across the city on the theme of *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* For this exhibition we are hosting artist Jai Chuhan with *'Refuge'*, premiering new paintings which take inspiration from her position as an Indian-born British artist.

More details available at www.asiatriennialmanchester.com

Taking us through into spring *'Mahtab Hussain: You Get Me'* will explore the critical question of identity among young working-class British Asian men through a series of 24 portraits taken over a nine year period in Birmingham, Nottingham and London. *'You Get Me?'* investigates the dynamic relationship between identity, heritage and displacement.

For all the latest updates to our programme and activities please check our website: www.galleryoldham.org.uk

CAFOD ANNOUNCES NEW DIRECTOR

21 November 2018: Christine Allen will be the new Director of CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development), the international aid agency announced today. Christine has held leadership positions at two faith-based international development organisations for the last 17 years. Since 2012, she has been the Director of Policy and Public Affairs for Christian Aid. As a senior leader and high-profile representative for the organisation, she has lobbied and influenced political and private sector leaders on significant policy changes on tax justice and climate justice, led senior-level external relations for CEO and other departments, held leadership roles on global and UK bodies, as well as supporting Trusts, Foundations and Major Donors initiatives. She was also responsible for theological reports underpinning Christian Aid's policy work.

She was Progressio's Executive Director for 11 years, from 2001-2012. Before joining Progressio, she worked for ten years in the area of housing, poverty and social exclusion in the UK as Head of Public Affairs at the National Housing Federation and Education Department Coordinator at CHAS. Her career began as a field worker with the Justice and Peace Commission in the Archdiocese of Liverpool in 1987 and as CAFOD's campaigns coordinator in 1989.

Christine said: "I'm honoured and delighted to be appointed to this role at CAFOD. It feels like coming home. Working for CAFOD as a young campaigner, I discovered Catholic Social Teaching and was hugely inspired and influenced by a church that took action for peace and justice. The need for global solidarity today is as great as ever. CAFOD, and its thousands of supporters, stands as a powerful witness of love in a world of greed and selfishness, as we seek to end the injustices of poverty, inequality and environmental exploitation. I am immensely proud of CAFOD, its work and its role in the global Catholic family and I feel humbled to lead such an important agency of the church."

Bishop John Arnold, CAFOD Chair of Trustees, said: "I welcome Christine back to CAFOD with great joy. She is a strategic leader whose vision, energy, and deep-rooted faith and commitment to Catholic values, make her specially placed to lead CAFOD's journey in the coming years. Christine will take up the post in spring 2019. CAFOD's current Director Chris Bain has temporarily delayed his retirement until this date. <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/36037>

DIARY DATES

DECEMBER

1 World AIDS Day National AIDS Trust worldaidsday.org

1 Write for Rights 9.30am to 12.30pm, In the Kitchen at Storyhouse, Chester, CH1 2AR. The annual 'Write for Rights' campaign is the world's biggest letter-writing event. Chester and Wrexham Amnesty Group are arranging a public event. You have the opportunity of exercising the 'power of the pen' by sending a card with a message of hope and support to those facing violence, threats, intimidation and even death.

2 Sustainable Chester Winter Fair 11am, Industry, 1 Overleigh Rd, Chester, CH4 7HL. Chester Friends of the Earth would love a good attendance so they can again put on an event like this in the future. Anyone who has a business or organisation with a Sustainable theme please come along. Email chesterfoe@hotmail.co.uk for info and to book.

7 Film Show & discussion on Fracking 7pm, Westminster Community Centre, Church Road, Ellesmere Port, CH65 2ER. Organised by the Frack Free Dee group in connection with the January 2019 Inquiry into the I Gas proposals for gas well testing at Portside, Ellesmere Port. Further information: outreach.frackfreedee@outlook.com Refreshments provided.

9 Songs and Readings to mark end of WW1 3-4pm Stockport Art Gallery Memorial (Wellington Rd South opposite Town Hall) followed at 4pm by **Candlelit Vigil for Peace** - all welcome but please book as space limited: www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/celebrate-the-peace-tickets-51913776503

10 UN Human Rights Day 70 years since declaration of human rights www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/resources.shtml

10 Film showing 'A Cambodian Spring' 6pm at Storyhouse, Chester, CH1 2AR. To mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Chester & Wrexham Amnesty Group have organised a showing of the film 'A Cambodian Spring'. This film is an intimate and unique portrait of three people caught up in the chaotic development that is shaping modern-day Cambodia. Tickets and further information available at <https://www.storyhouse.com/event/a-cambodian-spring>

11 Ecumenical Quiet Day for everyone 10am-4 pm at The Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, Tithebarn Grove, Lance Lane, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 6TW. Input and time for individual quiet prayer and reflection. Cost £10 Tea & coffee provided. Bring your own lunch. For more information or to book: Tel 0151 722 2271 email: winniecenacle@mail.com

11 CAFOD Liverpool Carol Service. This annual carol service is always a highlight of Advent, featuring local schools and a speaker from CAFOD. St Teresa's, College Rd, Upholland, WN8 0PY 7pm

15 Chester Friends of Palestine, street campaigning 10.30am-12.30pm. Meet up outside HSBC, Eastgate, Chester. We will also be giving out Christmas cards. Further information: ChesterFriendsofPalestine@hotmail.com

17 Romero Talk Steve and Anne Atherton will report on their pilgrimage to El Salvador, with special emphasis on the Connect 2 village of Guaymango. St Anne's, 23 Prescott Rd, Ormskirk, L39 4TG 7 pm

18 International Migrants Day un.org/en/events/migrantsday

18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019 Material for the week

30 Sunday Worship led by Sarah Teather, Jesuit Refugee Service Radio 4 8am-10am

JANUARY

8 Quiet Day at the Cenacle see December 11

11-13 Christians Aware annual conference *Future Earth? - Sustainability for the Environment for Farming and for Healthy Food* Swanwick, Derbyshire. <http://www.christiansaware.co.uk/Conf-22019.html>

15 CWDF Forum 6:45pm-9pm The Unity Centre, Cuppin Street, Chester, CH1 2BN. The first Forum gathering of the New Year. Speaker Helen Tandy on the theme **Ethical Investment/Divestment**. NB: This meeting is on the 3rd Tuesday of the month in place of our customary 2nd Tuesday.

15-18 & 22-23 Jan – I Gas Public Inquiry 10am, Chester Town Hall, Chester, CH1 2HQ. Public Inquiry concerning the Appeal by I Gas into the planning refusal for gas well testing at Portside, Ellesmere Port. The scheme raises broad issues of climate change as well as significant local environmental and amenity concerns. The Frack Free Dee group are presenting evidence, and hope that as many people as possible come in for an hour or two, or stay with the Inquiry team to support them. Further information at www.facebook.com/FrackFreeDee

18 CAFOD Quiz Night Our Lady's Parish Centre Ellesmere Port Town Centre 7.30 pm. Admission: adults £3 children £1 which includes Fairtrade refreshments at the interval. All money raised will go to the CAFOD project in Ethiopia Connect 2. Contact Tony Walsh on 0151 355 6419

18-25 Only Justice Week of Prayer for Christian Unity originates from the churches of Indonesia, where there is a strong emphasis upon the need for unity alongside the nation's ethnic and religious diversity. Resources also highlight issues of economic injustice and how religious pluralism can face challenges in the face of radicalisation. The theme is based around Deuteronomy 16:18-20, 'Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue...' <https://ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer>

20 Peace Sunday *Good politics serve peace* <http://paxchristi.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2019-Peace-Sunday-Booklet-final.docx>

20 Archdiocese of Liverpool Justice and Peace Commission Annual Memorial Lecture. This year's topic is *Homelessness* with a speaker from the Whitechapel Centre in Liverpool. At LACE, Croxteth Drive, Sefton Park, Liverpool L17 1AA 1- 4 pm. More details from Steve Atherton 0151 522 1080/1 s.atherton@rcaol.co.uk

26 Quiet Day at the Cenacle see December 11

27 Holocaust Memorial Day <https://ctbi.org.uk/holocaust-memorial-day-27-jan-2019/>

FEBRUARY

9 NJPN Open Networking Day 10.30-4.30 CAFOD, Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JB. Contact NJPN, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX 020 7901 4864 admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk or see <https://justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-meetings>

12 'Eritrea and Human Rights' 7.30-9pm, Best Building, University of Chester, off Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ. A talk by a speaker from Eritrea for Amnesty International. For further information contact Gill Miller 07941 629236.

12 Quiet Day at the Cenacle see December 11

15 CAFOD Quiz Night see January 18

23 Quiet Day at the Cenacle see December 11

MARCH

1 Women's World Day of Prayer "Come, Everything is Ready" written by the Women of Slovenia based on Luke 14:15-24

3 Church Action on Poverty Sunday Look at poverty in a different light www.church-poverty.org.uk

9 International Women's Day 11am-3.30pm Chester Town Hall. Chester Women's Aid's annual celebration of IWD provisionally to be held on Saturday 9th March in the Town Hall. They are looking for entertainers, stall holders and volunteers, please let them know if you are interested. www.chesterwomensaid.org

12 Quiet Day at the Cenacle see December 11

13 CWDF Forum 6.45pm-9pm The Unity Centre, Cuppin Street, Chester, CH1 2BN. The second Forum gathering of 2019. Open session on local responses to the concerns of climate change and climate justice (to be confirmed). 01244 350323.

15 CAFOD Lent Family Fast Day 39th ROMERO MASS MARCH 24th

22 CAFOD Quiz Night see January 18

24 The first **Romero Mass** after the canonisation of our patron saint will be the 11 o'clock Mass at St John's as part of their 200th anniversary celebrations. St John's, 13 Powell St, Wigan WN1 1XL 11am

- Many items taken from the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com an invaluable free resources for up-to-date J&P news, events and in-depth articles.
- Sign up for weekly e-bulletins from NJPN (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues) and resources at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk or contact admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk 0207 901 4864

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

BOOKING FORMS AVAILABLE EARLY 2019 for Annual Justice & Peace Conference, 19-21 July 2018

'Forgotten People, Forgotten Places: Being Church at the Margins'

Speakers: Keith Hebden (Urban Theology Unit), Robert Beckford, Professor of Theology and Culture in the African Diaspora, Canterbury Christ Church University. Chair: John Battle.

Contact NJPN, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX 020 7901 4864 admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk, or see <https://justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference>