

NJPN Open networking Day 19 September 2020

Approximately 30 people gathered on Zoom for the NJPN September Open Networking Day

The morning session started with prayer.

From his home in Wallsend, Paul Southgate led us in a prayer from the Northumbria Community. We placed all we do in the hands of our Lord and prayed to act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Paul reflected on the recent discovery of a 5th century chalice with Christian iconography that was found near Hadrian's Wall in the remains of a Roman fort. This gives the glimpse of a multi-cultural church in Roman times, before the missionary work St Aidan and King Oswin in Northumbria.

Today's open networking day followed on from the Zoom mini-conference in July. We considered our response to issues highlighted in the conference and reflected on an alternative model of church, a post pandemic church.

The keynote speaker for our morning session was **Speaker: Barbara Butler** Executive Secretary of Christian's Aware (Co-opted to NJPN Exec) the title of her presentation **The moment of crisis has come** (words of David Attenborough)

Before describing the devastating impact that human activity is having on the earth and all that lives on our planet, Barbara reminded us of our opening prayer - God is with us, we are not alone. She also spoke the words of Julian of Norwich – 'All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' Julian lived during the Black Death and it is thought that she lost her husband and child in the pandemic.

After describing the impact of poverty, environmental degradation and climate change, Barbara quoted Malcom Palmer. '... We have got a choice to make – we have walked to the edge of the cliff and need to step back and walk the other way'.

Barbara suggested that our challenges for the world are:

- The development of small farms throughout the world
- Support and education of women
- An increase in agricultural diversity
- An increase in crop diversity
- More efficient energy

We were offered a challenge – 'The time is short; the moment has come. The situation is recoverable if we make choices to promote sustainability and commit to protect our world.'

Barbara explained that we were meeting on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. She invited us to make New Year resolutions for the future of our world.

We then split into break-out groups to discuss pointers suggested by Barbara:

Where we are going? What is our future? What will sustain us? What can we do on different levels: Individual, family, church, locally, country, and world?

Feedback from the breakout groups and questions

- Some people were depressed and anxious. Others saw signs of hope - there is an increased sense of urgency, people are on the cusp of moving in the right direction. Recently church leaders have joined Extinction Rebellion protests and a number of dioceses are looking at their ethical investment policies. There is a worldwide movement to protect the environment.
- We need to be politically active. It is important that we vote and encourage young people to vote. The importance of lobbying MPs was highlighted. There was a discussion of populist politics. People are moved by emotion rather than logic. We need to look at ways that we can communicate our message to challenge populist leaders who appeal to people's emotions.
- It was suggested that Laudato Si has all the answers – it is not just about the environment, but social injustice which is a cause of environmental degradation.
- During the pandemic many people have had the opportunity to re-engage with the glory of God's creation and there is a greater awareness of the beauty of nature and the importance of biodiversity. It was suggested that we could use the Season of Creation to talk about sustainability and show that everything is connected. The Covid-19 lockdown has given many the opportunities to reflect and reorder their lives.
- One group noted the lack of clarity for seeing the future. As Christians we want to know the will of the Lord, so discernment for the coming year will be crucial. Although we have little control over national decision making, we need to discern how to be a force that challenges what is presented to us.
- Within our parishes we have not been able to gather and develop community. Our church leaders have a major concern to open our churches safely, so we need to ensure that justice and peace issues are not overlooked in our parishes and wider church community.
- A positive way to tackle injustice in the world is to encourage our parishes to support CAFOD in their valuable work. CAFOD works on behalf of the Catholic community to help families around the world who face chronic food shortages, malnutrition and poverty as the result of coronavirus.

Resources mentioned by groups.

- [David Attenborough BBC1 programme about Extinction](#)
- [The Global Catholic Movement webinars](#)
- [Columban podcasts on biodiversity](#)
- [Operation Noah: Catholic investment for an integral ecology: webinar series](#)

Noticeboard – this is summarised in a separate document

The keynote speaker for the afternoon session was **Melvin Lyons**, CARJ Trustee, who spoke about **A Response to Racial Injustice and Inequality**

The CARJ response to racial injustice and inequality is to look at the broad spectrum of continued racial inequality and injustice. Mervin began by explaining the background and history of the current Black Lives Matter movement as an anchor for the talk, rather than to focus on the movement.

- Black Lives Matter (BLM) was formed by human rights activists in 2013 in the USA. It is part of a preceding and broader movement -The Movement for Black Lives. BLM is heavily influenced by the US civil rights movement of 1950s and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (founded in 1909).
- As a human rights movement BLM seeks to reverse anti-black racism – to transform black communities that are maligned and marginalised. Inequalities are a powerful force holding back the development of black people.
- Black Lives Matter advocates non-violence, it has open affiliation and seeks to reconcile tensions in urban and rural communities. It is rooted in civil society, a collective voice of truth to power.

We watched a TED talk given by Michael Gibbs of the Movement for Racial Justice and Corrymeela Community. Michael reflected on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on black and brown workers. He proposed that the Black Lives Matter movement and the wider social justice movement can work together to promote significant change. ‘To be successful the movement for social justice needs to be more than changes in policies and law. The movement needs to be reciprocated changes in the way we interact on a human person to person basis. It must help us to overcome our inherent biases about race and identity’. Michael spoke of principles for the foundation for positive human relationships:

Essential Steps to True Social Transformation

1. Tolerance (open, non-partisan attitude)
2. Patience & Understanding
3. Inclusion
4. Education (for Sensitivity)
5. Activism

Few Simple Steps for Making a Difference...

1. Learn to recognise and understand your own privilege
2. Examine your own biases and consider where they might have originated

3. Intervene whenever you witness a racist situation
4. Support and celebrate event that celebrate different cultures
5. Get involved with culturally diverse organisations

We then broke into break-out groups to discuss questions suggested by Melvin:

- *Without reconciliation it is not possible to achieve peace, but reconciliation is not possible without truth.*
- *Transforming Conflict, Change, Complexity and Confusion.*

Feedback from the breakout groups and questions

- People have different viewpoints and may disagree about the truth in a particular situation. There is a need for acceptance of another person's truth.
- For reconciliation it is important to develop relationships and recognise another person's truth.
- The importance of mediation.
- Recent events have made people more aware of the way that western countries have become rich as a result of slavery and colonial history. One group commented that this should have been obvious earlier. We have only been taught 'white history' in schools. Some groups discussed white fragility (where a white person feels uncomfortable and defensive when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice).
- Begin by educating ourselves and having these conversations. Speak openly, truthfully and honestly. Emphasise things we have in common.
- There is a need to have difficult conversations – with our families and communities. We should not be afraid to engage in a conciliatory way when we have these conversations.
- More work is needed within our church communities.
- It was suggested that roll play could help people learn how to confront people who are being racist.
- BLM marchers addressed by Bishop Rose in Canterbury: [Bishop Rose addresses the Canterbury #BlackLivesMatter march 13 June 2020](#)

Reflection and closing liturgy – led by Ann Farr of Pax Christi

Ann led us through a reflection and liturgy for the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC). People of faith all over the world are encouraged to demonstrate the power of prayer with action for peace in Palestine and Israel. His year it takes place from 13th to 21st September. The theme is "Creative Solidarity in Common Fragility".

Annette Brindle