

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL ACTION & SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES IN PARISHES IN THE DIOCESE OF SHREWSBURY

Summary of Mapping Exercise by the J&P Commission

Preamble

After responding early in 2011 to the 'mapping' exercise carried out by Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), it seemed that a similar exercise might prove fruitful in the diocese. All parishes had been contacted in 2007 for a review of J&P work in the diocese, but this new initiative was envisaged as including a wider range of activities and was deliberately open-ended in order to include whatever respondents reported.

The following email was sent to all parishes in June 2011, with a reminder in September 2011)

In a mapping exercise, the Justice & Peace Commission is collating a list of environmental/social justice/action projects in the diocese. These may be parish groups or initiatives e.g. J&P Group, SVP, CAFOD support, support for Pax Christi, Poverty Action Week, fund-raising projects for schemes in India, links with a project in Latin America etc. We'd also like to know of other environmental/social justice/action initiatives in the community in which Catholics are involved e.g. The Ark (Birkenhead), Wellspring (Stockport), Marple, Mellor, Marple Bridge Energy Saving Strategy), Chester World Development Forum. Please email brief details to the J&P Coordinator Joan Sharples.



'Social action' and 'social justice' are closely linked, but **social justice** might be defined as addressing root causes: 'getting people to ask why?' and most parishes included responses which might fit in this category.

Response

A total of 26 responses were received from the 119(?) parishes in the diocese. These were collated in the form that they were received and shared with members of the J&P Commission together with the following questions:

- What were your observations, thoughts, and feelings as you read the collection of responses?
- How do the responses relate to the work of the J&P Commission?
- What should the Commission do in response to this information?

A summary of the information was distributed at the J&P Commission Meeting (8/10/11) and initial observations made, discussed and noted.

Initial Observations

Responses were rich and wide-ranging showing a wealth of awareness of the needs of others, each parish responding in its own way 'ad-hoc action' dependent on the particular interests of the parish priest or members of the parish.

Only three responses made reference to **environmental initiatives**: two had links with community initiatives and one J&P group ensures 'eco friendly activities in the parish bulletin to involve parishioners'.



Almost all responses mentioned **social action** initiatives in which parishes were involved: support for homelessness projects was well represented with parishioners collecting money, foodstuffs and toiletries for – and volunteering at – local projects (see list of organisations). Other parishes mentioned involvement with a Youth Drop-In, hosting Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings, commitment to a local community centre, the Lourdes group, and support for the Catholic Children's Society. The Catholic Clothing Guild supplies clothing to Women's Aid and Refugee support projects.

Support for CAFOD was mentioned frequently, although the form this takes varies considerably: 'promotion of Fast Days', fund-raising, awareness-raising', and 'campaigning'. Nine parishes mention support for fairtrade either in the parish or as part of a fairtrade town initiative. Four parishes mentioned support for Pax Christi, whilst another holds monthly peace vigils. Three parishes run greeting cards campaigns, one with information from ACAT-UK, the others unspecified. One parish holds regular International Masses. Other initiatives mentioned were: the Live Simply pledge, Refugee Week, Robin Hood tax, CARJ *Changing Face of Britain* project and Progressio, Church Action on Poverty (CAP), and Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) were cited. Responses mentioned action, rather than prayer. (Perhaps this was due the phrasing of the email, or maybe it was just taken for granted that the initiatives follow from prayer and reflection. Specific reference to such mentioned a Prayer Surge, International Masses, peace vigils, Stations of the Cross, and a

Romero service. Only a couple of people made any reference to Catholic Social Teaching. In a parallel initiative, schools were invited to send information on their justice-and-peace related activity and two schools have, so far, responded. A Primary School reported on its peace programme and a High School its Remembrance Garden.



Who is involved?

It would seem that sometimes action is initiated by individuals, others by the church council, J&P Group, CAFOD group, CWL, and sometimes projects are ecumenical initiated by Churches Together, or community-based.

Overseas Parish Links



Bolivia, Congo, Ecuador, India, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Romania, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Zimbabwe.

Specific Initiatives & Organisations mentioned by Parishes

Action by Christians against Torture (ACAT-UK)	Good Samaritan Centre (Nairobi)
Alcoholics Anonymous	Help for Heroes
Amnesty International Prisoner Card Campaign	Life
Apostleship of the Sea	Light for the Blind (Kerala)
Association for the Propagation of the Faith (APF)	Little Way Association (India)
The Ark (Birkenhead)	Live Simply
Asylum Link (Liverpool)	Lourdes Group
Barnabus (Manchester)	Macclesfield Accommodation Care & Concern (MACC)
Café Unity (Heald Green)	Mary's Meals
Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT)	Mill Hill Missionary Society
Carelink	National J&P Network
CAFOD	Ndi Moyo (Malawi)
Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ)	Overseas Aid for Sierra Leone (OAKS)
Catholic Children's Society	Operation Christmas Child
The Catholic Clothing Guild	Operation Noah
Catholic Women's League (CWL)	Oxfam
Chester World Development Forum	Pax Christi
Christian Aid	Prim Dan (Mumbai)
Church Action on Poverty (CAP)	Progressio
Colimes Mission Project (Ecuador)	Refugee Week
Cornerstone (Manchester)	Robin Hood Tax
De Paul Trust	Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC)
Educaid	St Ann's Hospice (Manchester)
Fondacio	St Joseph's Centre (Warrington)
The Foyer (Ludlow)	St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP)
Francis House Children's Hospice (Manchester)	Stockport Refugee Support Group
Friends of the Holy Land	Stockport Women's Aid
Greasby Messenger	SVP Furniture Project
Greasby Outdoor Activity and Leisure (GOAL)	Trafford Credit Union
	Traidcraft
	UNICEF
	Vision Aid for Africa
	The Wellspring (Stockport)

Strengths

- Fundraising for a huge variety of initiatives particularly for local projects
- Strong support for overseas parish links
- Support for CAFOD.
- Practical support for local projects and the 'hands-on' work of the SVP.



Weaknesses

- The exercise gives an incomplete picture and undoubtedly there is much more going on than has been collated.
- Dearth of environmental concern
- Structural causes are not well addressed.
- Catholic Social Teaching still seems to be the 'Church's best kept secret'.

For Consideration

- How can people be helped to make deeper links between prayer and action/life and faith?
- How can people be encouraged to reflect on root causes, structural sin – ask why?
- How can overworked parish priests be supported in these areas of work?
- How can Catholic Social Teaching be better promoted?
- Would it be useful to form 'networks of information exchange'?
- Can we encourage parishes to celebrate what they are doing within the parish?
- Can we encourage parishes to celebrate what they are doing at a diocesan level?