

Shrewsbury and Liverpool Justice and Peace Commissions

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Issue 57

From 'Populorum Progressio'

Each person is a member of society and hence belongs to the community of humankind. It is not just certain individuals but everyone who is called to further the development of human society as a whole. Civilizations spring up, flourish and die. As the waves of the sea gradually creep farther and farther in along the shoreline, so the human race inches its way forward through history.

We are the heirs of earlier generations, and we reap benefits from the efforts of our contemporaries; we are under obligation to everyone. Therefore we cannot disregard the welfare of those who will come after us to increase the human family. The reality of human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations. (Sec 17)

Finally, a word to those of you who have heard the cries of needy nations and have come to their aid. We consider you the promoters and apostles of genuine progress and true development. Genuine progress does not consist in wealth sought for personal comfort or for its own sake; rather it consists in an economic order designed for the welfare of the human person, where the daily bread that each man receives reflects the glow of human love and the helping hand of God. (Sec 86)

Encyclical of Pope Paul VI March 26th 1967

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ROMY TIONGCO IN DANGER

Shrewsbury Diocese Justice and Peace Commission has received a request for support and prayers from Romy Tiongco, formerly Christian Aid Regional Coordinator and good friend to the J & P Commission. Most of you will remember Romy's outstanding contributions to a number of our biennial conferences in addition to other seminars over the years. Many people from across the north-west of England will also have met Romy and his wife Linda through their work with Christian Aid. Both of them have worked in a variety of positions for the organisation over the last sixteen years. They are currently in Sri Lanka busy with post-tsunami work. In between times Romy has been active in his native Philippines, on a timber harvesting project - a money earner for locals and a winner for the ecology.

THE CRISIS AND THE REQUEST

Romy and Linda have been in tight spots before; but, as in Sri Lanka, are worried more about the local people than themselves. But the present danger is something else. When Romy returned briefly to the Philippines in October 2006, he was persuaded to stand for the post of Mayor of Damulog at the May elections. Damulog is a municipality in the Province of Bukidnon, on the island of Mindanao, about 500 miles SSE of Manila. In a political climate plagued by corruption and intimidation, his ability and integrity was thought to win the hearts of the less privileged members of society. Other like-minded people agreed to stand for the Council, and Rogelio Estudillo, a life-time friend, became the group's political organiser. On January 4, Rogelio was shot to death at his home. Romy and other candidates have been threatened. Two withdrew from the contest, only to be replaced by others – brave people! The police are looking into alternative scenarios, but Rogelio's death looks like a political assassination; Romy feels in considerable danger. Some of his supporters are angry, but

respect Romy's principled pacifism. Romy hopes that non-violence will overcome violence and that the ballot box wins over the bullet. Romy, ever ecumenical, is part of MuCAARD, the Muslim-Christian Agency for Advocacy and Development, and they are among his supporters.

At such a time, experience has shown that if the victim is known internationally and with support and solidarity abroad, governments can react quite quickly – if sufficient fuss is made. Local police are more likely to pursue their inquiries more vigorously if Manila feels the situation could be embarrassing! It is suggested that letters be sent to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, or to The Melo Commission (a government body appointed to look into political killings) *urging an urgent investigation of the murder of Rogelio Estudillo, stressing that in the context of current intimidation, this death must be of considerable concern in any democratic country. Our anxieties for the safety of Romy should be made clear.*

Letters can be sent to: The President H.E. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Malacanang Palace, JP Laurel, Manila 1005, Philippines.

The Melo Commission, The Office of the President Malacanang Palace, etc as above

Or to MuCAARD (the Muslim-Christian Agency for Advocacy, Relief and Development) #12 11th-15th Streets, Nazareth Subdivision, Cagayan do Oro City, Philippines 9000.

Letters can also be sent to the Philippines Embassy, 9a Palace Green, London W8 4QE. (Approaches via the Embassy have proved fruitful in the past.)

For more information contact Joan Sharples or Campaign Coordinator: Peter Byrne, 01244 678087.

Useful points in letter writing:

MR. ROMY TIONGCO AND EVENTS IN DAMULOG, BUKIDNON PROVINCE

Recently returning to the Philippines from the UK, Romy has been working with the local people on particular rural development projects. He was then persuaded (against his initial instincts) to stand for election as Mayor of Damulog in the Province of Bukidnon – in some ways taking up the role that he had held for nine months as an interim measure in 1986. Since Romy agreed to stand, he has been the victim of number of threats, and a close associate, Rogelio Estudillo, was shot dead on 4th January.

Romy is held in great esteem across Cheshire and north west UK as a result of his work here on behalf of justice and peace through out the world, and through his inspirational support of many UK groups, some secular, some religious. As for Romy's activity in the Philippines, we see his founding work with MuCAARD, the Muslim-Christian Agency for Advocacy, Relief and Development, as a true beacon of light in our troubled world.

Urgently ask that the President/ Embassy does whatever is possible to assist all relevant agencies to secure peaceful election processes in the Damulog area. These actions must surely include a bringing to justice of the killers of Rogelio Estudillo and secure, on-going protection for all candidates and officials in the forthcoming elections.

A TESTIMONY TO NON-VIOLENCE

This a general letter I am sending out to all companions in the quest for justice for Rogelio Estudillo's murder and for clean, honest and non-violent elections.

I went through the mill of emotional turmoil. It was only six days after I received news of mother's death when I got a mobile phone call that the political organiser of the group I was involved with to challenge the incumbent Mayor in the May elections had been brutally murdered a few steps from his home.

It revealed the utter vulnerability of our group. I was 18 when I read Henry Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*. It opened the world of non-violence and I read books about Gandhi and Martin-Luther King. It made me take a second-look on the life of Jesus. It led me to authors like Graham Sharpe and Ron Sider. I wanted to know more about the Quakers and Mennonites. When Linda and I thought first thought of establishing a development agency, we chose the name 'Kalinaw' - Bisayan for 'Peace'. I made a poster which read: 'WANTED REVOLUTIONARIES: Men and women who are willing to die in the process of building what they love, not men and women who are willing to die and to kill in the process of destroying what they hate.' Our group didn't have goons or armed-bodyguards. I don't even own an air-rifle or a water-pistol.'

When I received the news of Rogelio's death, I just felt numbed. That night I could hardly sleep. Then I felt helpless, afraid, discouraged. But I also remember feeling very angry. I experienced murderous thoughts of revenge. Day in and day out, friends and acquaintances expressed their sadness and anger. As days passed fears were still expressed but there was a growing dominance of anger and revenge. So many came trying to talk me into agreeing to hit back before 'they' hit again. They said that we should get the 'head', and not bother with the 'tentacles'. There were at least two very serious offers to carry out the 'job'.

But I had other friends deeply committed to non-violent action. For the time being, we had our way. If violence must be used, then it must be the last resort. We hadn't exhausted all the non-violent means possible and **within** our reach.

I want the campaign for justice for Rogelio to take off the ground and to succeed. If the authorities move quickly enough, there is a very good possibility that we will enjoy a relatively free and honest elections. But if any member of our political group becomes another victim of violence, some people will make their own move. Through a chain of whispers, I was told, 'Buhay ang inutang, buhay din ang kapalit.' (Life was

owed, life will be the repayment.) My greater fear is if I become the victim of violence, I will not be around to stop them declaring a 'clan war'. I cannot allow political violence to take root in Damulog. Justice for Rogelio campaign must succeed. There is no choice if non-violence is to prevail. And I believe we will triumph.

In the past weeks and month, I prepared myself to die. I made myself believe that I can do more for Damulog dead, than alive. Looking back, this was the one reason big reason why I couldn't tell Linda, Aisha and Zac by phone or by e-mail about my decision to run for Mayor. The possibility of death loomed so high that I couldn't think positively. I went back to my catechism for strength. I was taught that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the the church. If I am killed, I do not want anyone to take revenge. Let my death be my sermon that **belief in the after life** demands the quest and the struggle to enable everyone, no-one excluded, towards enjoying fullness of **life before death**. Wealth, power, worldly goods and pleasures are not worth killing for but equitable access to them for everyone is worth dying for. Some said that I am brave. I am not brave. I am afraid. I don't want to die. But I am not allowing my fear to freeze me into in action - to stop me from doing what I believe my situation is asking me to do - because death can be a service to people. I see a lot of meaning in this kind of death and I think I can accept it, if and when the time comes. May God give me the strength to make this my offering.

During the past few days, I received feedback of what you have been doing. I am deeply moved. I am inspired. Two nights ago I told Linda, with growing conviction, that every letter, every petition, every media coverage demanding justice for Rogelio Estudillo was making the possibility of another political murder in Damulog more and more remote. I started to believe that non-violence will triumph over violence. I began to dream of winning the election. I grew in hope that I will serve again the people I served as a priest 30 years ago and, 20 years ago, as their Mayor. You made me believe that Rogelio's dream that I would come back as Mayor of Damulog can come true. Thank you. Thank you very much.

'What good can come out of Nazareth?' 'What good can come out of Damulog?' The seeds of 'engaged citizenship' has been sown in the different parts of the country. The emergence of democratically mature citizens is unobtrusively taking place. May Damulog contribute and hasten the process.

Once again, to one and all - daghan kaayong salamat (thank you very much)!!!
Romy P. Tiongco

JUSTICE FOR THE HOMELESS?

At this year's Memorial Lecture in Liverpool, on Homelessness Sunday, Alison Gelder (Chief Executive of Housing Justice) gave a clear explanation of the extent of the national housing problem. It was a real privilege to hear Alison make a complex situation understandable. It might help to share the clarity of her presentation by reporting it as a series of points.

ROUGH SLEEPERS

She celebrated the massive fall in the number of rough sleepers in the last ten years but pointed out that the figures are starting to rise again. This recent statistical increase is attributed to 'new Europeans' who have moved into the UK; but even so it hides the fact that many rough sleepers are not counted because they hide in places where they will not be seen. Most women rough sleepers are very careful not to be found. The number of uncounted rough sleepers probably runs into thousands.

TEMPORARY ACCOMODATION

There are 70,000 families in temporary accommodation ... this amounts to 140,000 children who often suffer badly because an enforced and unwelcome change of address not only hinders their education but also disrupts their access to medical services and to friendship groups.

HIDDEN HOMELESS

In 2004, the CRISIS survey estimated that there were 380,00 homeless people who had no statutory rights. This group includes ex-prisoners, alcoholics and people with rent/mortgage arrears, who are deemed to be intentionally homeless.

There are an estimated 220,000 'Sofa-Surfers'.

The 15,000 Gypsy and Traveller people on illegal sites are liable to be moved on at any time.

There were 10,000 squatters in 2004.

BAD HOUSING CONDITIONS - OVERCROWDING and INAPPROPRIATE HOUSING

The current definition of 'inappropriate', known as 'the 1935 standard' because of when it was set, counts bathrooms, kitchens and living rooms as acceptable places to sleep. When the new 'bedroom standard' comes in later this year, the number of people officially living in inappropriate conditions will rise from 25,000 to 526,000.

There is a shortfall of approximately 300,000 houses with wheelchair access.

The level of disrepair is rising.

POOR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Alison reported how Housing Justice confirmed their suspicions of job discrimination based on Postcodes. They sent job applications that were identical except for the name and the address for a range of jobs. The result was that the people with the 'better' postcode were invited for interview.

The ten most deprived areas are: Liverpool, Manchester, Knowsley, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Islington, Nottingham, Easington & Hull.

THE INJUSTICE OF HOMELESSNESS

People without their own home pay more for basic needs: for food, for keeping clean and for phone calls. No utility bills mean it's impossible to open a bank account. Children have no space to play or to do homework. Poor housing puts mental health and family relationships under pressure.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Alison suggested that we can:

- Keep well informed

- Campaign

- Engage with the local authority about housing strategy

- Sign post enquirers to existing services

- Support existing services, possibly church based

- Support services that challenge local authorities' wrong decisions

- Invite homeless people to parish events

- Provide premises for parental contact with children. This is an important service as fathers are often unable to keep contact with their children if they do not have a suitable place to meet.

Steve Atherton

SNAP

(SHROPSHIRE NETWORK FOR ACTION AGAINST POVERTY)

For several years, there has been a local co-ordinating group with the memorable (?) title of The Shropshire Trade and Debt Justice Campaign. This has been a collaborative effort between the organisers of various local groups, mainly Christian Aid, CAFOD and Churches Together. It has co-ordinated campaigning, arranged events, organised coach trips to G8 summits, Parliamentary Lobbies etc, which have been generally well supported by local activists in Shropshire. It is now being relaunched as SNAP – the Shropshire Network for Action against Poverty. Its Statement of Purpose defines its role as follows:

SNAP will provide a focal point in Shropshire for individuals and organisations dedicated to achieving social justice in the world, through campaigning and mutual support and by establishing an information and publicity network.

The definition of *Poverty* is to include all its forms, whether in the developing world, or locally, however caused. It intends to continue the work of its predecessor group. In addition, however, it recognises that there is a wealth of other organisations out there engaged in some way or other in work along these lines. Some are branches of national or regional charities. Others are small, often informal, groups of local people bringing their efforts to improve the lot of those trapped in poverty. SNAP, being a Network, is seeking to establish what and where these groups are, in order to provide them with a means to contact each other, and to seek and obtain mutual support in their working and campaigning. SNAP is asking therefore for details of such local groups.

Who are they?

What are their objectives?

How can they be contacted?

What geographic area does their membership cover?

What geographic area does their work cover?

Are they willing to let their objectives be disclosed to others as described above?

Please send your replies to Ged Cliffe Fern Villa, Four Crosses, Llanymynech, SY22 6PR 01691 831374

GIVING AWAY OUR 'GOLD' CHAINS

The Justice and Peace group of the Churches Together in Heald Green observed One World Week in October by organising the completion of campaign cards and making gold chains bearing signatures, in support of CAFOD's campaign, seeking justice in the mining industry. At about the same time parishioners of St Ann's church Cheadle Hulme did the same and it was decided that the chains, in total 300 links long and bearing well over 300 signatures, would be taken to Argos in Stockport for a joint presentation.

The Manager of Argos, Mersey Square, Stockport, Peter Sheard received our representatives on December 14th and accepted four very long 'gold' chains. He promised to send them to Argos headquarters and was last seen heading off for his office, arms full and chains draped round his shoulders. We were grateful for his cheerful co-operation. We were able to obtain good publicity in the local press and Argos have recently issued a statement from their Head of Corporate Affairs, Laurence Singer, saying that they are considering signing up to the "Golden Rules" promoted by CAFOD, to achieve higher standard in the gold mining industry.



In conforming to the "rules", Argos would ensure that the gold they sell, as one of Britain's largest retail jewellers, was sourced, by their suppliers, only from mines where better practices were observed. Customers would then know that buying gold would not undermine the poor. People working in the mines in countries like Honduras or the Congo should have safe working conditions and should not be displaced from their land. They should not be left with water or land polluted or poisoned and they should benefit economically and socially from the huge profits made by the mining companies.

If you have not yet joined the "Unearth Justice" campaign, Sue Bownas (Tel 07920 232936) who is the Shrewsbury Diocesan Manager for CAFOD, and who joined us for the Argos presentation, has information. If you have made chains but not yet taken them to Argos or any other jewellers, do go ahead – it wasn't as difficult as we initially thought it might be!

Ann Taylor

'KEEP HOPE ALIVE' IN BETHLEHEM

Gwen Backwell from Liverpool, who has been to Bethlehem twice in the past two years to help Palestinian olive farmers, has written about the experience:

"I hesitated long before responding to my first opportunity to go to the Holy Land in October 2005, knowing that my life would never be the same again and that I would bear a considerable responsibility on my return. That has turned out to be true and life now is different. Working in the olive groves of the West Bank each morning, meeting a variety of individuals and organisations in both Palestine and Israel and visiting some key places each day, opened my eyes to the realities of living under occupation – a harsh military occupation that affects all aspects of daily and national life, an occupation that has strangled the economy of Palestine and the personal freedom of all Palestinians. An occupation enforced by guns on the streets and bombs from the air.

Getting a taste of this illegal collective punishment of a whole people and sharing in it for just a few days is enough to change your life: it brings an acute awareness and understanding of the real issues that tear the Middle East apart and fuel instability all over the world; it forges meaningful and lasting relationships very quickly; it enlivens an interest in those ancient stories of the Old Testament as well as the New; it plunges you into the depth of despair to come face to face with the force of fundamentalist strands in all of the three great monotheistic religions; it makes you weep with sorrow and anger to see the suffering heaped on all the communities of the region by self-obsessed, short-sighted and profoundly inhumane policies of successive Israeli governments; and one has a great sense of gratitude to the people for their friendship, openness and generosity.

Palestinian farmers in the Bethlehem area, together with the YM and YWCA, have a campaign called 'Keep Hope Alive.' By inviting internationals like me to go and help them plant olive trees where the Israeli army has uprooted and destroyed them (1 million trees have been destroyed for "settlement" growth and for building the Separation or Annexation Wall around the whole country), and to help with the olive harvest on land where it is too dangerous for farmers to go alone for fear of attack and arrest, they are building international solidarity and relying on us to be their voice in the outside world by which they feel abandoned.

Perhaps the most important thing I learned on these journeys was that it is we in the West who have a prime responsibility for Keeping Hope Alive for the Palestinians and for those Israelis who struggle against the odds for a just and peaceful solution. It is western governments, and especially those of the US and the European Union who hold the key to progress by their ability to put pressure on Israel. The Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem was speaking in Liverpool recently, describing the hopelessness that has driven so many Palestinian Christians to flee their homeland. Christians are now an endangered species in the Holy Land and he appealed to us to live up to the Christian calling of peace-maker to do everything possible to bring a just and lasting peace, to show active solidarity with the descendants of the very first Christian community, and to speak the truth of justice and peace for both Palestinians and Israelis."

Gwen is offering to give a slide-illustrated talk on her visits to the Holy Land and the issues raised above to any interested group. Please contact her direct on 0151 709 2407.

AN ETHIOPIAN ODYSSEY

What is your picture of Ethiopia? For many it is still television images of the great famine of 1984/5. But much has changed in the intervening 22 years. Let's begin in the capital, Addis Abeba.

A vast sprawling city spread over a series of hills at 8,000 feet above sea level. People walking everywhere. Very colourful clothes. Much urban poverty evident - children begging. Gaggles of school children in uniforms, many of them carrying knapsacks. Venerable old people wrapped in white *gabbies* (large shawls) with their tall 'walking sticks'. Mothers with their babies wrapped in a shawl on their back. A few people asleep on the pavement. Loaded donkeys in convoy threading their way through streets full of battered taxis and trucks. Many beautiful

women and handsome men, tall and slim. It seems the entire population wrap themselves up against the cool morning air.

Such was a first impression of this huge country - virtually the size of western Europe, with a population of nearly 71 million, half of them under the age of 15. Ethiopia has never been colonised by a European State except briefly by Italy in the 1930's. It has an ancient history of which it is very proud - a history filled with legend; the first emperor as son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the mysterious kingdom of Prester John, and so on. It is a country which has suffered - the "Red Terror" and the famine of the 1980's for example.

AN ETHIOPIAN ODYSSEY continued

Although widespread famine is now a thing of the past there is still evidence of malnutrition in the rural areas (where 85% of the population live).

There has been war for decades on Ethiopia's borders with Eritrea and Somalia. Refugees from the Sudan have flooded into the country over the years. The government finds it impossible to provide health, education and social security for all. The present government represents largely one ethnic group but other groups feel left out which creates pockets of unrest.

But there are also signs of hope. We move two days journey west of Addis to the small rural town of Aira. Aira is in Oromia and the inhabitants speak Oromifaa. The Oromos are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia but suffer from lack of consideration by the ruling party in government. Let's take a walk through the town,

There is just one main gravel street - dust in the dry season, mud in the rainy season (the last piece of tarmac road was left behind 200 miles back). Little side alleys lead to many homes. One takes you down to the market place. There is not a two-storey building to be seen. Homes are mainly built of wattle and mud with thatched or corrugated iron roofs. Some small shops line the street. One advertises itself as a "Modem Barbar" (sic)! Jerry cans lined up beside the town well. Coffee beans are laid out on plastic sheets to dry in the sun, though not as many as usual for this year adverse weather conditions have ruined the coffee crop on which so many small farmers depend for a living. Any white face attracts a horde of small children, and we feel like the Pied Piper of Hamelin; "Hello!" they shout, and burst into uncontrollable giggles. The road descends sharply and at the bottom of the hill is the 80-bed hospital and School of Nursing, under the care of the Lutheran Church Synod. These are spacious single-story buildings laid out in carefully tended grounds, with covered walkways. We call in at the maternity ward one day, to find that eight babies were born the night before. Sadly three mothers lost their baby - the staff are relieved that they were able to save the mothers' lives. Sometimes pregnant women from outlying areas are not able to get to the hospital in time because of the difficult terrain; they have to travel by mule or be carried on a litter by family and friends. Malaria, AIDS, and TB are big problems here also.

In addition to the hospital and nursing school there are 14 rural clinics under the care of the church, a secondary school, a water project, and a women's empowerment project. The latter is particularly significant. "Women carry out 100% of the

processing of basic foodstuffs; 90% of the fetching of household water and fuel - wood; 80% of food storage and transport from farm to village; 90% of the hoeing and weeding; 60% of harvesting and marketing. Harmful traditional practices, such as early marriage, rape, kidnapping, harassment, and female genital mutilation ruin women's self confidence and self esteem. They are affected psychologically, physically and spiritually by these experiences." (Ebise Ashana, Project Director).



As well as the church secondary school there is another school which was built three years ago by the people of the town for pupils who could not afford school fees (the government pays teachers' salaries and provides a little money for text books, but is unable to finance the building of schools). We discover that the school secretary is a volunteer, working with only a portable typewriter as equipment. The teachers have built their own 'Banda machine' out of an old metal cylinder, pieces of wood, felt, etc. and also a telescope. They are totally dedicated to their work.

Aira also boasts the Onesimos Nesib Seminary, which trains men and women for pastoral work and for ordination. Onesimos Nesib was the translator of the bible into Oromifaa. The Seminary currently has 59 students taking a 3-year Diploma course.

What lessons can we learn from this beautiful but poverty-stricken country? We see our (Northern) way of life as the norm, but Europe, North America and Australasia have only a *minority* of the world's population. Those who live in countries affected by poverty are in fact the norm. Our way of life as a society is unsustainable, and ('when the oil runs out') in the end we shall have to learn how to live from the people of the South. In terms of spirituality we need to remind ourselves that the future for most in Ethiopia and the other countries of the South is full of uncertainties, while our religious outlook does not expect disruption. Yet disruption is at the heart of the gospel - all our futures are unknown, just as they were for the disciples of Jesus and for Jesus himself. We can learn from Christians such as those in Ethiopia to live with uncertainty, trusting solely in God's mercy and justice.

From Bryan & Bernice Halson who spent the autumn term volunteer teaching in Onesimos Nesib Seminary and Lalo Aira Secondary School.

SET ALL FREE

25th March 2007 will mark 200 years to the day that a Parliamentary Bill was passed to abolish the slave trade in the British colonies. The trade, despite the interventions of the Royal Navy, continued illegally even after the Act was passed. The Act to abolish slavery in the British colonies did not bring about freedom for enslaved Africans until 1838 and it was in 1888 that slavery was finally abolished in the Americas. For many people, the image that comes to mind when they hear about slavery is of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We think of the buying and selling of people and their shipment from one continent to another. It is something we think of as part of our history rather than our present. But the reality is that **SLAVERY STILL CONTINUES TODAY**.

Millions of men, women and children around the world are forced to lead lives as slaves. Although this exploitation is often not called slavery, the conditions are the same. People are sold like objects, forced to work for little or no pay and are at the mercy of their 'employers'. Contemporary slavery takes various forms and affects people of all ages, sex and race. .

SET ALL FREE has been set up by Churches Together in England to commemorate this bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade and to work to end exploitation of people around the world today. For more information see www.setallfree.net

Services to commemorate the Bicentenary:

Saturday March 24th in Liverpool

11.00 Music from Liverpool Gospel choir

11.30 Service begins in the Anglican Cathedral

12.30 Congregation makes its way from the Cathedral to the Albert Dock

1.30 Scattering of petals at the Albert Dock

Sunday March 25th Service at Manchester Cathedral 10.30 am Eucharist

Preacher : the Archbishop of West Indies arranged by Greater Manchester Churches Together

TRAVELLING ANTI-SLAVERY EXHIBITION

This was compiled by the Hereford Diocese Council for Social Responsibility, and is being shown throughout 2007 in a succession of venues around Shropshire and Herefordshire. The exhibition is not intended to dwell on the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1807, although that is an important milestone in itself. It seeks to take the viewer through the history of slavery from earliest times right up to the modern day, a phenomenon which, regrettably, is still with us. If it is thought that slavery is not a major issue today, it reminds us that whereas in 1807 there were, it is estimated, 2 million slaves around the world, the figure in 2007 is nearer to 20 million! This is defining slaves as those in Physical Slavery – held to work against their will - rather than those in economic slavery.

The exhibition looks, in turn, at the origins of slavery; the particular forms of slavery which led to the 1807 Act and the conditions under which slaves were transported across the Atlantic Ocean; and then goes on to show the wealth which accrued to Britain and its traders as a result of this trade in human beings. This leads on to the rise of the Anti-slavery movement and shows the local connections both of the trade itself and in the abolition campaign. The exhibition then deals with the changes to the nature of slavery in the nineteenth century before coming to slavery today, in its many forms, and inviting those visiting the exhibition to petition the British Government to ratify and implement the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings.

I commend this exhibition to anyone who has an interest in human rights and justice, and who wants to find out more about this largely hidden evil, in both our history and our present day economic system.

The Travelling Anti-slavery Exhibition will be in Shropshire during the rest of 2007 at:

St Mary Magdalene Church, Bridgnorth.....March 19 to April 10
St John the Baptist Church, Bishop's CastleApril 30 to May 18
West Midlands Agricultural ShowJune 23 and 24
Meeting Point House, TelfordOctober 8 to 26
Shrewsbury CathedralOctober 29 to Nov 16

Ged Cliffe

'STOP THE TRAFFIK' UK TOUR

Over four hundred people gathered in Manchester Town Hall on Sunday, 28th January to support the launch of the *Stop The Traffik* UK Tour. Surrounded by Ford Madox Brown's magnificent wall paintings depicting Manchester's history, the Lord Mayor, in his opening words, recalled that it was a sermon given by Thomas Clarkson at Manchester Cathedral in 1787 which provided the impetus for the Campaign for the Abolition of Slavery. Manchester thus provided the ideal starting point for the *Stop the Traffik* tour. *Stop the Traffik* is a major global coalition which aims to raise awareness of the continuance of forms of slavery, human trafficking and other injustices into the twenty-first century, and to influence governments to act against this.

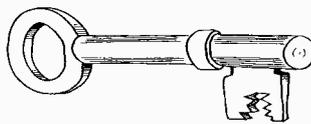
Marion White was first to speak for the campaign, introducing a U.N. video report on the link between poverty and people trafficking, which together with a talk by Steve Chalke in December 2004 had inspired her to devote her energies to *Stop the Traffik*. She had been one of a group of eight women who had travelled to Mumbai (Bombay) to witness at first hand the effects of modern-day slavery and trafficking, visiting *Oasis* projects there which work with some of the women and girls affected. The video report emphasized the appalling and global extent of the problem: currently around 12.3 million people are subjected to forced labour worldwide, while 600,000 to 800,000 human beings (80% of whom are female) are trafficked across borders. Many of these end up in the sex trade. People Trafficking now takes third place behind Arms and Drug smuggling as an illegal source of income, which goes a long way to explain why it is the poor of Asia, Africa, South America and Eastern Europe who are particularly vulnerable.

A series of further speakers added their weight and perspectives to this main message. Neil Brown, a former DCI who now works for the *UK Human Trafficking Centre* in Sheffield, spoke of plans to prevent the abuse by raising awareness of human trafficking in Romania and Bulgaria. He recalled the details of case studies in which he had been involved and indicated the nature of the problem. Last year about 80 18-24 year old girls had been rescued, but some Vietnamese children had also been discovered who had been kept locked in houses solely to cultivate cannabis. The full extent of the problem was not known: cases such as this could be found in towns and villages as well as the big cities.

Paul Field, a musician and composer, spoke about his involvement in the campaign and introduced his new musical "Cargo", which celebrates the work of the abolitionists and the fight for freedom. During the course of the evening, some of the songs from this

musical were performed, the audience being invited to join in with the lively choruses.

Michele Hawthorne introduced the charity *Compassion*, whose particular concern is children who, through poverty, can become victims of forced labour and child trafficking in countries such as Bangladesh and Haiti. A video was shown of the life of a young "restovek" girl in Haiti who had been forced to work as unpaid domestic labour after the death of her parents. *Compassion* encourages supporters to sponsor such children to enable them to be taken onto a programme which offers a full education and vocational training, so they may have the chance of earning their own living in the future.



The last two speakers were particularly moving. Dorrie, a 14 year old girl, spoke with great conviction of her feelings on meeting in Mumbai with a girl of her own age who had been kidnapped at the age of 11, drugged and taken to a brothel in another town. This had clearly made a great impression on one normal Western teenager. Finally, Peter Green, founder of the *Barnabus project* in Manchester clearly demonstrated how human trafficking is a problem on our very doorstep. He told us the story of Libby, a girl from a Christian family in Essex who, under the influence of a young male crack dealer, ran away from home and ended up working in a massage parlour in Blackpool. Drug use had led her to be deeply in debt to the madam of the establishment, forcing her into prostitution. Working together with a local Anglican priest, Peter managed to rescue Libby in a night-time escapade which he recounted very vividly. At the end of his speech, he revealed that he and his family were opening their home as a safe haven for Libby, who is still very much under threat from her creditors.

The evening was rounded off by a further video presentation to accompany a song in which all were invited to join. The many ways in which the aims of *Stop the Traffik* can be furthered were clearly reiterated: for example people can sign Global Declaration cards and petitions, write to their Members of Parliament, make a greater effort to buy fairly traded goods, sponsor a child and in a host of other ways show active support for the campaign. The array of Fair Trade and information stands outside the hall provided the opportunity and impetus to put good resolutions into immediate practice.

If you wish to explore the *Stop the Traffik* campaign further, go to www.stophettraffik.org, where you can find all the necessary information and links. Also www.oasistrust.org and www.compassion.com.

Kath Dibbs Marple Churches Together J & P Group

A NOTE FROM ARCHBISHOP PETER SMITH

regarding Catholic adoption agencies and the current controversy

Since June 2006 we have been in dialogue with the Government over the impact of proposed discrimination regulations on our Catholic adoption agencies. These regulations would require our agencies to consider adoption applications from same-sex couples. As you will be well aware, matters came to a head over the last week. Although, sadly, we did not obtain the exemption we had sought from these regulations, the Government has decided to allow our agencies until the end of 2008 to work out a way forward. The Government is setting up an independent assessment process in an attempt to help us to find ways in which the future work of our adoption agencies can be safeguarded. However, we have yet to see the detailed proposals.

During the debate it has become clear to everyone that our Catholic adoption agencies do an excellent job and are generously supported by our community. Their contribution, together with the selfless generosity of the many Catholic families who offer themselves as adoptive or foster parents, is a wonderful contribution to the common good of our society and a great Christian witness of love in action. Your Bishops, working together with their agencies, are determined to do everything they can to find a way through the real difficulties we face and ensure that the future of Catholic adoption services in this country can continue.

We want to make it absolutely clear that our agencies remain open for business and are continuing their work with local authorities. Therefore, please continue to support the work of our diocesan agencies. Do please pray for this work. Do continue to give generously to support our agencies.

As Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor has pointed out very clearly, this public dispute with the Government has raised wider issues about the role of faith and conscience in the public space. We all need to promote mutually respectful co-operation between public authorities and religiously motivated agencies so they can work in public service with integrity and good conscience in the service of the common good.

Do please write to your MP about these very important issues and do keep an eye on the Bishops' Conference website www.catholicchurch.org.uk

Archbishop Peter Smith Chairman, Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship,
Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

31st January 2007

NOTE ON PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE FOR THESE REGULATIONS

The Regulations will be laid before Parliament within the next few weeks. These Regulations cannot be amended, but do require the approval of both Houses of Parliament. As far as we understand at the moment there will be a short debate followed by a vote (probably in a committee) of the House of Commons.

TRAIDCRAFT TUESDAYS

Over the past six years I have sold Traidcraft products to the total equivalent of three hundred hours. I am now currently studying for my A levels but I like to continue running the stall as it is for such a good cause.

I first heard of Traidcraft when it was suggested to me as an idea for lent fundraising instead of retailing commercially branded sweets and chocolate. I established the stall within St. Ambrose College in 2001 and each year since have had a team of peers help to run and coordinate sales both at lunch times and during break time. The team first started off as myself, Alex Lindsay and Chris Harrison but both others have now left the college. The team has been added to over the years but after year 11 the team diminished quite rapidly leaving me to run the store alone.



The stall initially was a lenten fundraiser and hence was only temporary but then I decided to make the stall a permanent fixture within college life. This has proved to be very successful with sales nearly doubling within the last six months of trade. The store is set up every Tuesday and has been dubbed 'Traidcraft Tuesdays' around the student body.

Although the stall doesn't sell enough stock to compete with leading retailers we like to think that we are not only helping to get people fairer prices but we are educating pupils about needs and the welfare of others. In this, we have succeeded. The pupils have learnt about the cause the stall aims to help and make it a duty of theirs to bring in money to purchase Traidcraft products. I have found that even those who cannot afford any of the products wish to donate what they can to the cause also. This to me is why I have managed the stall for six years; the spirituality that can be seen within St. Ambrose pupils and their incessant need for helping others.

After I finish my time at St. Ambrose I aim to leave the stall in the capable hands of a pupils from Year 8 who will then continue what has now become a tradition

Scott Johnson

WRITE FOR JUSTICE

Become an MP Correspondent

Have you ever wanted to do more than sign a postcard? Do you sometimes want to really put pressure on politicians to get them to take action? Bridget Burrows, from CAFOD's Campaigns Team, explains why writing for justice can really make an impact.

Have you ever thought how much power you have over your MP? Take a simple action like writing a letter. MPs know that most of their constituents living in the local area, with busy lives, rarely get the chance to sit down and write a letter to their MP about the issues that actually matter most deeply to them, like world poverty. Consequently, MPs operate on the assumption that for every letter they receive, there are at least ten other constituents who care, but will never get round to writing to them. A few letters, and they think the electorate are fascinated by the subject. Therefore, one personal letter from the likes of you or me has a big impact.



CAFOD has a network of campaigners called MP Correspondents. These campaigners write to their MP about four times a year at CAFOD's request.

If you find you've been campaigning on the issues for a while but want to do more than just write postcards, or you like challenging the Government, but you don't really want to come to big events, you may like to become an MP correspondent and make really powerful impact from the comfort of your own home.

To help you, CAFOD will send you request letters with a brief explanation of the issue and a very specific and timely action for your MP to take. This is the most important bit. MPs sometimes want to help but are left wondering, "what do they want me to DO about it?" The letters will be timed to coincide with really crucial decision moments, such as the G8 Summit, or the World Trade Organisation meeting in December. And they'll ask your MP to take an action that could affect the outcome of the issue, and help millions of people around the world.

You'll also get full support. CAFOD's campaigns team will provide help if you would like to find out more about your MP, or if you need advice on replying to a letter they've sent you. You will also receive briefings on the latest 'hot' issues and insider information on Parliament.

Campaigning like this works.

Writing letters is one of the most powerful actions you can take. Personal letters from voters affect MPs in a way that postcards and emails simply can't. Feedback shows that MPs are deeply impressed by the high level of knowledge of their CAFOD constituents on complex debt and trade issues. This contribution to CAFOD's campaigning has a powerful impact.

CAFOD is particularly keen to recruit MP Correspondents for the following constituencies:

Shrewsbury Diocese: Birkenhead, Cheadle, Denton & Reddish, Eddisbury, Hazel Grove, Tatton, the Wrekin, Warrington South, Wirral South, and Wythenshawe & Sale East

Liverpool Archdiocese: Chorley, Crosby, Knowsley South, South Ribble, Southport, Warrington North, Warrington South, West Lancashire

For more information on becoming an MP Correspondent, please contact Bridget Burrows, CAFOD Campaigns Team, on 020 7326 5590 or email bburrows@cafod.org.uk

Through the year with OSCAR ROMERO

The daily meditations are taken from the recorded talks of Oscar Romero, revealing his love for the poor and dispossessed and the grace that made him a true and faithful pastor to his people.

"Oscar Romero of San Salvador, archbishop and martyr, allowed the message of the Gospel deep into himself and let it take root in his life." (John Sentamu)

Co-published by DLT, CAFOD and Christian Aid with a foreword by John Sentamu Cost: £9.95

The Stations of the Cross with Oscar Romero

Anne O'Connor has made a powerpoint presentation that any groups or individuals are welcome to use.

For a copy please e-mail Anne at: anneoc980@hotmail.com

March 11th Liverpool Romero Mass **March 21st Romero Service at Altrincham** see Diary for details

