

Shrewsbury and Liverpool Justice and Peace Commissions

Spring 2009

"I sincerely believe that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies, and that the principles of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale"

Thomas Jefferson, US President 1801–1809 and author of the Declaration of Independence

"The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths. The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit."

President F.D. Roosevelt, Inaugural Speech, 1933

"The poor masses of our land find in the church the voice of Israel's prophets. There are among us those who sell the just for money and the poor for a pair of sandals, as the prophets said. There are those who pile up spoils and plunder in their palaces, who crush the poor, who bring on a reign of violence while reclining on beds of ivory, who join house to house and field to field so as to take up all there is and remain alone in the land (cf. Amos 6:3-4; Isaiah 5:8). These texts of the prophets are not distant voices that we read with reverence in our liturgy. They are daily realities, whose cruelty and vehemence we live each day.... The church's good name is not a matter of being on good terms with the powerful. The church's good name is a matter of knowing that the poor regard the church as their own, of knowing that the church's life on earth is to call on all, on the rich as well, to be converted and to be saved alongside the poor, for they are the only ones called blessed."

Monsignor Oscar Romero 17 February 1980, a month before he was assassinated

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Issue 65

PUT PEOPLE FIRST

Even before the banking collapse, many people in the world were suffering from poverty, inequality and the threat of climate chaos. Now the net has spread much wider and most of us feel as if we are involved in some way. Decisions which we do not really understand have been made in financial institutions over which we have no control. These are now affecting us in the UK as they have been hurting the world's poor and the environment for many years. The world has followed a financial model that has created an economy fuelled by ever-increasing debt, both financial and environmental. Already policy makers are speaking of the systemic failure of the current financial architecture and the need for regulation. It is time that those worst affected by decisions have a say in making them, rather than return the status quo, in which the few make decisions to the detriment of the many. Our future depends on creating an economy based on fair distribution of wealth, decent jobs for all and a low carbon future.

There can be no going back to business as usual.

In the light of the current economic crisis, development NGOs (including CAFOD & Christian Aid) are joining with trade unions, faith groups, environmentalists and other civil society organisations, to call for a fair, sustainable route out of recession.

The **Put People First** platform is united by three linked calls:

JOBS: *decent jobs and public services for all*

JUSTICE: *end global poverty and inequality*

CLIMATE: *build a green economy.*



More specific demands on the UK government are to:

- Create a 'Green New Deal' to create jobs in the environmental sector
- Invest in essential services including social housing
- Provide emergency funding to countries that need it to protect jobs and provide social protection
- Tackle tax havens - especially those linked to the UK
- Insist on democratic reform of the World Bank and IMF
- Make all financial institutions and multinational corporations transparent and accountable
- Ensure that poorer states are allowed to take responsibility for managing their own economies rather than having liberalisation measures forced upon them
- Introduce robust regulatory requirements and financial incentives at national level and push for them at international level to stop climate chaos
- Commit to substantial new resource transfer from North to South to support low carbon development.

For more information on these demands and insights about the present crisis see www.bond.org.uk



What actions have been planned?

On 2 April the leaders of the world's richest economies meet in London for the G20 summit to discuss their response to the crisis.

On Saturday 28 March 2009, Put People First will take to the streets of London for a mass demonstration to send a strong message to the G20 leaders.

The march will assemble on the Embankment en route to Hyde Park for a rally to be addressed by speakers and celebrities from the UK and around the world.

Before the rally, there will be an ecumenical service, starting 11am at Methodist Central Hall Westminster.

Other events being planned by organisations who support the platform including an economic counter summit, actions to expose unaccountable financial power and a major blogging event.

Posters, information and registration for the Rally on www.putpeoplefirst.org.uk

Whether you can make it or not on the day, please add your voice by signing the petition to Gordon Brown via the link on the CAFOD website www.cafod.org.uk/peoplefirst

“IT’S ORTHODOX TO BE RADICAL”

Report of Francis Davis’s talk at annual Memorial Lecture at LACE, Liverpool on Sunday 25th January, 2009

Steve Atherton writes:

Francis Davis is the first director of the new Las Casas Institute at Blackfriars Hall in Oxford. The new Institute aims to become a significant but specialist centre of scholarly enquiry with a focus on social justice and leadership for social change. It aims to share the fruits of its own research and that of the wider university with many who would not normally look to universities for such insights and resources. It will also work with sixth formers nationally and young faith based leaders internationally. Last academic year Blackfriars worked with over a thousand sixth formers in the South East and North West as part of its ‘Leaders To Come’ programme for 16 and 17 year olds.

Francis pointed out that we spend time both inside and outside of many groupings, including the church. We want to see a match between words, places, institutions, deeds, habits, etc but that the reality and perception depend on our point of view. He briefly mentioned the role of deacons ... inspired by camps of Dachau and the duty of justice, ‘to give and not to count the cost’.

He said that the way we deal with finance is a challenge to church and to the J&P movement. He called for a rich theology with a radical vision: not just for speech, not just for deeds and not only looking to the past to validate what we do today.

He used the analogy of overspending on private credit cards to explain how the banks had got themselves (and us all) into the current mess. He warned that it is a ‘ticking bomb’ that will have a knock-on effect as the credit for hospital and prison building finance collapses because of the Government’s securitisation strategy. The financial squeeze will also have a knock-on effect on local government and put pressure on the voluntary sector.

He moved on to remind his audience that there will be major changes in the church in the UK during the next 5 years. There are big shifts in demography (not only the clergy are getting older) and in ethnography e.g. Polish immigration.

This sense of transition has led to problems of interim management in the time between two periods of certainty. He instanced the cardinal’s problems with child protection as an example of a ‘stampede to caution’. The hierarchy is faced with demands for support from different groups all wanting different things and has been drawn into involvement with issues that attract support e.g. embryology, gay adoption. It has missed the opportunity to gather expert opinion and knowledge that would have avoided ‘knee-jerk’ reactions. We expect spiritual leadership from our bishops, not that they be experts on the science of embryology or on other technical issues. We were astonished to learn that the government’s proposed Charities Act, which stated that feeding the hungry is not a religious act, was accepted by Eccleston Square (the office of the Bishops’ Conference) who released a response without consultation. Fortunately the religious congregations challenged it and the proposal was dropped from the Act.

He highlighted a further centrist tendency at Eccleston Square to see itself as ‘Head Office’ with the expectation of raising and controlling funds. Francis gave the example of a NW Irish Catholic who responded to Cardinal’s letter by giving £1m to Eccleston Square. But this wasn’t extra money, the donor withdrew it from NW hostels for the homeless that he had previously supported with the result that hostels closed, workers were made unemployed and people were left on the streets. This raises huge dilemmas... should generous and wealthy Catholics support an Ecclesial centre or a Homelessness centre? The further question asks where is the church? How is the money transferred from the rich church to the poor church? Francis left us pondering the theological process that decides where the money should go. Our UK version of conservative and radical is challenged by the world church.

Looking at the worldwide church, Francis pointed out that the Church is more than just parishes, religious institutions, dioceses and organisations. Our church is the largest health and education provider in the world with not only 128,000 parishes globally but also 141,000 hospitals and 180,000 schools.

Looking at the national picture, he pointed out that 71% of population called themselves Christian at the last census (interestingly, this rose to 93% in the Liverpool area) but that representation in national press and the media doesn’t reflect these numbers.

Moving closer to home, he said that according to publicly available statistics that he’d read that morning on the internet, Liverpool archdiocese has £48m income and £49m expenditure annually, and £127m assets (many of which can be seen as liabilities.) With the current furore of the lack of funding for NJPN, he pointed out that CAFOD’s budget is smaller than Liverpool’s or Westminster’s with the clear implication that the dioceses could make more commitment to the national J&P body.

In conclusion, he said that because the Church in Europe isn’t at the commanding heights of politics we need to be ‘networked and fleet of foot’ and rethink the way in which we utilise our resources, how we advance philanthropy and how we advocate for causes. We can be confident that the secular world includes faith communities and we can be confident of our theology and our tradition. We can make fresh alliances as we seek to advance the work of social justice as essential gospel activity and we can ask tough questions of the resources carried in our name. All this is to be done with ‘ferocious gentleness’.

My one sentence summary:

Centralisation of finances in attempt to preserve the structures that keep organisation going, makes it difficult to remember the mission.

Implications:

Training for readiness to take on roles in secular society e.g. governors of schools, local councillors, credit unions, all forms of engagement with civil society.





NATIONAL ETHICAL INVESTMENT WEEK 17-23 MAY 2009

This is a cooperative campaign to encourage people to consider a green or ethical option for their investments. Not long ago, Fairtrade products were not very well known, but through the efforts of campaigners and activists Fairtrade Fortnight has shown consumers the positive impact they can have by buying Fairtrade goods. Today there are all kinds of financial products available that take into account ethical, social or environmental issues in different ways —from investment funds to savings accounts, pension schemes to life insurance policies. However, not everyone is aware of the options available.

Ethical investing in the UK has its roots in the faith community. Churches, charities, and people of faith were the first to take account of ethical criteria when making investment decisions. Throughout the twentieth century, they used their power as investors to address such issues as unfair labour practices, apartheid in South Africa, and arms trading. Since then, the number ways to invest ethically has grown, as have the number of issues that green and ethical investments address.

We are asking for your help to spread the word during National Ethical Investment Week (17-23 May 2009). To get involved:

- Order the National Ethical Investment Week Faith Action Guide, available at www.neiw.org Download posters and leaflets to put up in the back of your church or community hall.
- Ask your religious leader to focus an act of worship and/or sermon around ethical investment during National Ethical Investment Week. Inspirational reflections and prayers are available from the NEIW Faith Action Guide.
- Contribute an item about ethical investment to your local faith community magazine and/or website. We will have buttons and banners available to use on your website, and text available to put in your newsletter.
- Write a letter to your local newspaper voicing your support for National Ethical Investment Week (a sample letter is available in the Faith Action Guide).

We hope that people of faith will consider investing their money in a way that takes into account social, environmental and ethical concerns. By getting involved in National Ethical Investment Week, you can help us let others know what they can achieve by investing their money in a more green and ethical way.

A Faith Action Guide for and other resources will be available by the end of February at www.neiw.org or from Helen Boothroyd, Church and Membership Relations Officer for ECCR (Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility): email helen.boothroyd@eccr.org.uk; phone 01325 580028.

The following websites provide useful information that can help you review your own investment decisions:

www.neiw.org

www.eccr.org.uk

www.charitysri.org.uk



Ann Gill writes:

If you are looking for a place to put your some of your savings where they do some good, instead going towards the obscene bonuses in the finance industry we have heard so much about recently, then please read on.

Shared Interest is a co-operative lending society that aims to reduce poverty in the world by providing fair and just financial services. They have been part of the fair trade movement for 17 years and work extensively with community-based businesses around the world.

The following extract is from their quarterly newsletter in Autumn 2008:

Meltdown, free fall, crash. During the current storms in the stock markets Shared Interest is a welcome shelter for both savers and borrowers.

We always warn our members that their investments are high risk (we have a very low level of bad debt: just 2% over the last 5 years) and low return, (the current interest rate to savers is 1%) but over the last twelve months it has been better to have shares in Shared Interest than in many other financial enterprises... There has never been a greater demand for our services but unless we get more investment very soon we may have to start turning away loan applications simply because we do not have any more money to lend.

We need your help now to ease the credit crunch where it really hurts – in the poorer parts of the world. We are asking you to put a bit extra into your accounts and to encourage your family, friends and colleagues to join us in investing in a fairer world.

Every pound you invest in a share account ca be lent and repaid – again and again and again.

It is now about eleven years since an article on Shared Interest first appeared in MouthPeace and we thought it about time we encouraged our readers once again to put at least some of their savings in Shared Interest. The 'credit crunch' may be hitting some of us hard, but the effect in developing countries is devastating. Credit financing for small producers, especially in Africa and Latin America has always been difficult; either ridiculously expensive or non-existent. Within the last few months commercial lenders, at interest rates of up to 30%, have withdrawn all credit facilities. This has meant that producers are relying solely on non-traditional financial companies, like Shared Interest, to provide them with the credit they need to survive.

If you would like to know more, Shared Interest can be contacted at: Shared Interest, 2 Cathedral Square, Groat Market, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 1EH Tel: 0191 233 9100 or www.shared-interest.com

THE CHANGING FACE OF BRITAIN

During 2009, to mark its 25th anniversary, the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) has organised a programme of local events culminating in a national celebration at Westminster Cathedral on 7 November 2009.

The programme will explore the theme *The Changing Face of Britain*, and has a twofold aim. It will

- celebrate the ways in which the Church and the wider society have changed for the better over those twenty-five years
- attempt to read 'the signs of the times' and discern in the new situation the challenges that we are called to address in the future

As part of this initiative, Shrewsbury Diocese is holding a Diocesan Gathering which will be attended by Bishop Brian Noble on **Saturday 9 May at St Thomas More High School, Crewe**. It is hoped that the event will stimulate conversations between those who reflect the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity to be found within the diocese.

Seven parishes from very different parts of the diocese will share their experience and help initiate those conversations. Richard Zipfel and Rosie Bairwal from CARJ will be present at the event, both to gain greater insight into the situation in Shrewsbury Diocese and to give us here a picture of the national scene.

It is hoped that this initiative will promote reflection and discussion, which will recognise good practice to be promoted and identify challenges which require response. The event is open to all. Please contact Joan Sharples to register for the event (01270 620584 joansharples620@btinternet.com)

CARJ would welcome donations to fund its valuable work. Cheques can be made out to CARJ and sent to CARJ, 9 Henry Road, London N4 2LH.

***Beckoning God, Light in our wilderness,
You call your pilgrim people to your promised land.
In our diversity, we celebrate your creativity.
In the faces of strangers, may we recognise our brothers and sisters,
As we travel together in pilgrim conversation towards your promised land.***

Amen.



COUNTDOWN TO COPENHAGEN 2009

In December 2009 officials from more than 190 nations will gather in Denmark for crucial talks about Climate Change. The meeting under the auspices of the UN Framework on Climate Change aims to deliver a treaty to follow on from the Kyoto agreement. So much is at stake for us all on our planet earth, but especially for the world's poor who are already experiencing the negative affects of human induced global warming without the resources to respond adequately. At a rally in London last December Mark Dowd of 'Operation Noah' called on Christians to be active in the lead up to Copenhagen. (see page 6)

In March CAFOD is launching its new international **CLIMATE JUSTICE** campaign. This calls on governments to negotiate a socially just, post-2012 climate agreement including:

- Recognition and support for the **right to sustainable development** of people in developing countries
- Provision by industrialised countries of additional, sufficient and secure **funding and technical support** to help developing countries adapt to the impacts of climate change
- Commitment by industrialised countries to at least a 30-40% **cut in greenhouse gas emissions** by 2020, based on 1990 levels

See also Page 6

Why Christians need to act on environmental issues:

'Living liturgically: Our liturgy is both the adoration of God for God's sake and the service of a world distorted by pride and greed. It is expressed not only in passion for the human family, especially in the middle of poverty and violence, but in passion for the whole material world, which continues to suffer the violence involved in sustaining the comfort of a prosperous minority at the cost of our common resources.' (Archbishop Rowan Williams)

'To hurt the earth is a sin' (Patriarch Bartholomew I)

'For the Christian there is a moral commitment to care for the earth so that it may produce fruit and become a dwelling of the human universal family'. (Pope John Paul II)

'We should care for God's creation—not out of fear about what is going to happen, but out of love....So Christians should be at the forefront of the environmental cause and movement because in our care for creation we reflect our love of the Creator' (Nicky Gumbel)

Used with permission of Christian Ecology Link *See also Page 6*



Eight ways to live gently on the Earth

Problems like climate change can seem too huge and complicated. We think we cannot solve such problems so we do nothing. We stick our heads in the sand and hope it will go away. But if we all do our bit we can make a difference. The only thing necessary for the destruction of life on God's Earth is for good people to do nothing. One reason for Christians to care about the material as well as the spiritual world is that Jesus became a part of our material world by being born as a human baby. If we are to honour Christ we too must take responsibility for caring for the whole Earth.

Christian Ecology Link has suggested 8 ways to live more gently on the Earth. How many of them can you manage to do? You can't do everything, but at least do something!



1. Don't fly!

Or if you must at least donate £50 to £100 to sustainable energy products and/or to disaster relief agencies (in reparation for the climate change of your flight.)

2. Drive less:

- Walk, cycle, take the bus or train whenever you can, and use local shops
- Organise a lift share scheme for your church – for both car owners and those without.

3. Use less electricity

- Turn lights off and use low energy light bulbs - Don't leave appliances like televisions on stand-by
- Dry clothes outside
- As well as using less, switch to green electricity through CEL's Operation Noah, and then the national Grid will have to buy equivalent electricity from renewable sources. If you are interested please telephone Good Energy (0845 456 1640) or Green Energy (0845 456 9550) and mention 'Operation Noah'

4. Use less gas or heating oil

- Insulate loft and walls and hot water system - Turn central heating thermostat down 1 or 2 degrees
- Turn hot water thermostat down to 45-50 degrees and have it on a timer - Wear an extra jumper

5. Repair, re-use, borrow or buy second hand rather than buying new:

- Recycle –find out about local swapshop networks, jumble sales and charity shops
- Use your own shopping bags at local shops – again and again
- If buying a new fridge, freezer, washing machine go for A rated
- When buying wood products, check the wood is from a legal and sustainable source.

6. Use your LOAF!

Buy and grow some food that follows CEL's LOAF principles for food:

- Locally produced, Organically grown, Animal friendly, and Fairly Traded
- Try to buy British fruit and vegetables in season and use local shops as it is often cheaper than in supermarkets and frequently from more local sources
- Buy free range eggs, free range British meat and eat less meat anyway
- Arrange a communal LOAF meal at your church

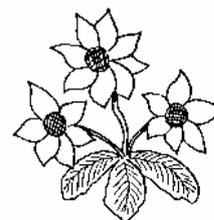
7. Save and cherish water:

- Fix water butts to down pipes - Fix dripping taps - Re-use water



8. Reconnect with the natural world.

- Go for a walk. Get wet. Dig the earth - Plant baptismal trees
- Include the Earth in all church liturgies
- Support a nature conservation organisation
- Take an interest in particular groups of organisms : e.g. wild flowers/bees/butterflies/fishes/birds.



Used with kind permission of Christian Ecology Link. You can find the leaflet from which these have been taken on www.christian-ecology.org.uk. Click Resources and look at 1b Topic leaflets. There are also plenty of ideas on actions for individuals and for church communities.

To join Christian Ecology Link see the various membership categories on the website or phone 01524 36241

CLIMATE JUSTICE CAMPAIGN



Sunday 15th March 9.30am 29th Annual Romero Mass
'Prophets of a future not our own'



a Family Mass at St Helen's Parish, Alexandra Road, Crosby, L23 7TQ

followed by northern launch of CAFOD's Climate Justice campaign

Family friendly workshops begin at 10.30am Shared table lunch 12.30pm (Bring food to share)

Guest speakers from CAFOD: Raymond Perrier, Head of Communities, CAFOD Partners from Cambodia *

Shrewsbury Diocese launch of CAFOD's Climate Justice campaign

Monday 16th March 7-9 pm
Shrewsbury Cathedral Town Walls Shrewsbury

with **Bishop Brian Noble Bishop of Shrewsbury**, **Chris Bain Director of CAFOD**, and CAFOD Partners from Cambodia *

The Cathedral will be open during the afternoon between 2-4pm. There will be displays and an exhibition for people to enjoy and activities for children.

More details and posters from Sue and Liz at the CAFOD Diocesan Office 01244 677594 or email: shrewsbury@cafod.org.uk. For those who cannot attend the launch Sue will be organising meetings around the diocese in April/May to engage with supporters, to share resources and the purpose and message of the campaign and to plan how we can all work together to promote as widely as possible in the diocese "to grow justice"

* CAFOD Cambodian partners are Khim Sarin and Lay Sophea. Cambodia is rich in natural resources such as oil, gas and timber. Exploitation of these is devastating the environment, and widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

To find out more see www.cafod.org.uk/climatechange

OPERATION NOAH - BUILDING ARKS TODAY



Noah and the Ark is a key story in the Abrahamic faiths and is well known to others outside religious communities. The story of the Flood, the Rainbow, Covenant and redemption is very appropriate to the present climate crisis. Why? Noah acted on climate change warnings and the Ark became a symbol of conservation and acting prophetically.

Operation Noah is encouraging people to take to the waters in boats throughout 2009. It is hoped this will raise awareness that we must act to protect God's creation. Children are being encouraged to dress up as animals and wear masks. The vulnerable communities of the developing countries most at risk of flood and drought can be represented by flags and images of families at risk.

25th June – 4th July "Noah's Barge"

A journey along the entire length of the Leeds – Liverpool canal

to raise awareness of environmental issues and to gather support for CAFOD's Climate Justice campaign, stopping twice a day for canal side gatherings. Details available asap on the CAFOD and J&P websites. Please come and meet Mr and Mrs Noah, family and friends

4th July Contacts' Day. Welcome Noah's Barge into the Albert Dock

and be part of a rally in preparation for the Cologne summit

Contact Liverpool J&P Office for more details. (See Liverpool J & P's LiveSimply challenge)



“GAZA - CLOSED BORDERS”

Anne Candlin writes on 3.2.09:

At the end of November 2008 I was in Israel and decided to go to the Erez border crossing at Gaza, because I had heard that there were 14 aid agency representatives stranded there. Gaza, a tiny 25 x 5 mile strip of land, is surrounded by an 8 metre concrete wall, built by Israel. Nobody can go in or out of Gaza without permits from the Israeli government: permits which are almost impossible to obtain. During November and December, the Israeli government had denied the aid agencies entry into Gaza and so they were unable to deliver their precious humanitarian aid to the starving 1.5 million people inside.

What brought the normally prosperous, well-educated Gazans to such a desperate state? Since 2007, a strict blockade has been imposed by Israel on Gaza, bringing it to a state of economic collapse. Between 500-700 trucks of goods a day are needed to sustain the population, yet on many days not a single truck was allowed to go through. Other days, maybe 50-150 trucks were allowed in, but never sufficient to sustain the population's basic needs. Trucks carrying Gazan agricultural produce for export were detained for days at the crossing so that the fresh produce rotted and Gazan farmers lost their income. Hundreds of Gazan students could not get permission to attend their universities abroad. Academics were prevented from attending conferences in other countries or even in other parts of Palestine. Fuel, Energy, Food, Medicine stocks were completely run down. Sick people could not attend specialist hospitals outside Gaza – as a result hundreds of seriously ill patients, including children, died.

In November, when we arrived at the crossing, the place was eerily silent. In the 3 hours we stayed there, not one vehicle or person came in or out. The silence and absence of traffic was foreboding. There were over 40 people in our group and we all sensed that something dreadful was going to happen to the starving people inside. Diplomats, clergy, aid agencies, journalists and medical teams were all denied entry, even though such denial is a breach of the Geneva Conventions. A British surgeon in our group, who had been many times to Gaza with a church-based agency, was forbidden entry. She had made appointments with her patients in Gaza to do facial reconstructive surgery but she was not allowed in.

On our return, there was little we could do except urgently email our MPs, MEPs and Ministers begging them to insist

that Israel opened the crossings. To no avail: on December 27th, as we all know, Israel began its air, land and naval bombardment of Gaza. Palestinians, of course, are not allowed any army, navy or airforce. The only airport they had, which was constructed for them by the EU, was destroyed by Israel, as was their major seaport. There is a huge inequality in military might between the Gazans and Israelis: Hamas' primitive, homemade Qassam rockets are no match at all for one of the most technologically advanced, USA-funded military forces in the world. Qassam rockets rarely meet their targets: in the seven years since they have been used, 17 Israelis have been killed, whereas thousands of Gazans have been killed in the same period by Israel. In the first five months of the ceasefire in 2008, not a single rocket was fired on Israel by Hamas – the ceasefire was broken, not by Hamas, but by Israel when it killed six Gazans on November 4th 2008. The UN, EU, and most of the major aid agencies in the world have condemned the disproportionate attack by Israel on Gaza. Reconstruction work and rehabilitation of the thousands of homeless, injured people will take years and yet aid is still being held up at the Gaza crossings.

What can be done? As Christians, is there anything that we can do to help? Palestine is the place where Jesus taught and practiced a way of peace and justice, where the first and oldest Christian communities were born. Christians have very special reasons, therefore, to care about the Palestinians. There is much that we can do: find out the facts rather than depend on mainstream media which often gives only part of the story; support twinning projects with Palestine – UK schools, trade unions, universities, churches are twinned with their counterparts in Palestine; travel to Palestine with indigenous travel agents who will arrange for you to meet local Palestinian Christian families; apply to go on an olive-picking week in autumn to help Palestinian farmers – many Palestinian Christian farmers have had most of their farmland annexed by Israel for the building of the Wall and Settlements and have become greatly impoverished as a result; get involved with the Palestine projects of Pax Christi, Oxfam, CAFOD and Christian Aid (all of these have websites and free resources where you can get information); or lastly, come to a weekend retreat on Palestine at Loyola Hall on May 22nd-24th organized by the J&P Commission. Remember, if you do go to Palestine you will be warmly welcomed by the generous, hospitable people who so much want visitors to come and see their beautiful land.

Prayer and Peace for the Holy Land” 22nd – 24th May

This is a Liverpool J & P organised weekend at Loyola Hall, Warrington Rd, Rainhill, Prescot. Input from members of the three Abrahamic faiths - group and private prayer time - a chance to discuss and to discern individual responses. Day participants are welcome on the Saturday and the Sunday. Full programme and booking forms available from Liverpool J&P office.

A LETTER FROM GAZA

Note: This message arrived from a courageous and widely admired pastor of the Catholic Church in Gaza, Fr Manuel Mussallam, written on 20 January 2009 speaking of the plight of his community in the wake of the Israelis' assault on Gaza. Here is what this veteran of the long struggle says:

"From the Church of God in Gaza: Peace and blessings upon you, as we pray to God to lift man's anger and shower Gaza with his mercy and kindness.

Gaza was suffering prior to the war, it suffered during the war and it will continue to suffer after the war. Hundreds of people have been killed and many more injured in the Israeli invasion. Our people have endured the bombing of their homes, their crops have been destroyed, they have lost everything and many are now homeless. We have endured phosphorus bombs which have caused horrific burns, mainly to civilians. Like the early Christians our people are living through a time of great persecution, a persecution which we must record for future generations as a statement of their faith, hope and love.

Many families fled to United Nations (UNRWA) schools where they thought they would be safe. But with 50-60 people to a room, no electricity, water, bedding or food and nowhere to wash, living conditions are terrible. Emergency aid has not yet arrived at the Church and because they are too frightened to venture onto the streets our people cannot reach the warehouses which hold Red Cross and UNRWA relief supplies. We trust in God but appeal to the whole world and in particular the Church to help Gaza. Your prayers and your kindness will be our salvation.

The war has affected everyone in Gaza. A teacher fled to our school with her husband and four children. He was hit by shrapnel from an Israeli bomb and his legs badly injured. She is distraught and terrified and when I spoke to her she was desperately looking for clean water to make a bottle for her baby. The Church has lost a 26 year old Catholic man, Naseem Saba, who was killed in an Israeli air raid on 7 January. The day before, Israeli jets destroyed his family home where he lived with his three uncles.

As well as the destruction and physical injuries the mental trauma of our people is incalculable. They will need help and support for years to come. They will have to find somewhere to live and we will need centres for those injured and disabled in the shelling, special schools for traumatised or orphaned children and a whole array of rehabilitation services.

Clean water is scarce so both our schools in Remal and Zaitoon provide local people with water from an artesian well, dug through the generosity of Austrian donors. The school's generator produces electricity for the nearby bakery as there have been no bread deliveries for weeks. People say: "The priest has become a baker," and it's true - we are glad to be able to do it.

The war must end now. The world has to find a solution for the Palestinian people and not simply revert to the position they were in before it began. The borders with Israel must be redrawn and the occupation, which began 60 years ago, has to end.

The status of Palestinian refugees must be resolved pursuant to the Right of Return, and East Jerusalem must be the Palestinian state capital. We must tear down the Apartheid Wall, open the border crossings, free Palestinian detainees and remove Israeli settlements so the land can be returned to its original Palestinian owners.. Peace is only possible if it embraces justice. If the world grants the Palestinian people their human rights there will surely be peace in the Middle East.

From all the people of Gaza we thank you, our friends everywhere, for your constant prayers and particularly for the support which we urgently need and we hope will reach us soon. We thank His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI for his stance in calling for peace in the Middle East and for his generous support to the poor of Gaza. And we thank all bishops, priests, pastors, monks and nuns across the world for remembering us in their prayers. On behalf of every Gazan, we share your prayers and say to the world: "From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen." (Galatians 6: 17-18)



VOICES FROM THE EDGE

Marian Thompson writes:



As part of Poverty & Homelessness Action Week (Jan 31 – Feb 8) the Performing Arts Students from Cheadle & Marple Sixth Form College produced 'Voices from the Edge'. In this unusual piece of drama, people affected by homelessness and poverty in Britain today tell their stories. These true testimonials were gleaned from in-depth interviews. Lasting about an hour, the performance was fascinating and challenging at the same time. The stories revealed the variety of places where people live in poverty today and the different back grounds they came from. Although all the students were in their late teens, by the end of the presentation you saw them instead as an elderly woman, a rough sleeper in London, an asylum seeker etc.

THE STORIES

A 59 year old rough sleeper in London had been in the RAF and only came out to please his wife. He worked for a while as a lorry driver but in the end, after 23 years, his marriage broke up. He tried life in a bed-sit as, because of his age, he could only get temporary jobs and having money problems he walked out one day and has managed since rough sleeping on benches in London. He would never go to a hostel where he thinks all the drug users and alcoholics end up – a recipe for violence! On the other hand **two men (30 & 40) were talking of their life in a hostel** in Glasgow. They were grateful for a place there. The worst thing they agreed was the stigma attached to living there. People's attitudes to you changed when they heard where you lived.

A widowed pensioner, age 73, had worked hard all her life with her husband but with low pay they had never managed to save. She was now struggling so her biggest dread was ending up in a council home. "The situation we find ourselves in, it's like everything is being stripped away from us. Begging for handouts the whole time. And we're losing our dignity."

A single mum age 54, most her life has been burdened with debt. She had bought up two children alone after her husband left. He never helped financially and she wouldn't take him to court wanting a peaceful life. At one time she used door-step money lenders but learnt they led to even more problems. She is at present looking for work but her age and lack of previous experience and qualifications are against her. "Practically everything has gone up. My gas and electricity was £62 a month. It's now £90 a month. Water rates, they've gone up. Bus fares have risen eight times in the last couple of years. With us being on benefits, it's hard. I know it sounds awful, but I buy my milk wherever I can get it cheapest. If I've got to walk there, I'll walk. By the time the weekend comes around, if we haven't got it, we go without. I'm trying to get a holiday this year. I want to be able to go to the sea, in a tent with my two grandkids. Is that too much to ask?"

Anna 52 started hearing voices when she was about 13, she did badly in school exams and often turned violent with people. Her parents took her to a psychiatrist who said she was fine. When she was at college she had a bad depression and tried to commit suicide. But even then the medical profession did not take her seriously. She managed to get a job as PA to a Head of Department of a national organisation in London. But then she was transferred to York and she was able to start buying a little cottage in a country village. But it was a lonely life - a single woman surrounded by farmers. She worked harder and harder with no friends or social life and eventually had another breakdown. She lost her job and took temporary work as a translator but debts started to pile up. The Citizens Advice Bureau came to see her because of the debts. She had to go to court and there it was recognised that she was ill. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia (30 years from the time she first heard voices) She had to sell her cottage and move so she could get good health care, She now lives on disability benefits and helps other people suffering from mental distress. Her biggest worry is losing her benefits and being forced back to work as she knows she could not cope.

Patrice, asylum-seeker from the Democratic Republic of Congo where he was a political activist. He saw his father beheaded after a street demonstration protesting against the government. He and his sister were arrested and kept in a small cell where they were violently abused. They were fortunate because an Italian priest managed to arrange their release and put them on a plane for Heathrow. But here their claim for asylum was eventually refused. His sister is now living with a boyfriend in London. "I was sleeping rough. I had no right to any benefits and I was not allowed to work. I passed some nights at St George's Crypt. At 4am I had to leave where I was sleeping and just walked the streets. I stayed with a friend for two weeks when I came back to Bradford and I have been living like that until now. No money. I have nothing."



CHURCH ACTION
ON POVERTY

What can we do to help?

The second part of the evening was a discussion panel with Councillor Hazel Lees and Peter Hodkinson from The Well-spring giving the local view, and Liam Purcell from 'Church Action on Poverty' putting things into a wider context.



Background : The Wellspring Stockport started in 1990 when it was decided by the churches in the centre of Stockport to provide a meal a day for the needy and unemployed. Since then many churches in the wider Stockport area have become involved and work together on the project. This has evolved from a basic soup kitchen run solely by volunteers to a place where many services are available. These include housing to health care, educational courses, art classes, health walks and much more. Now about 150 people are fed twice a day 365 days of the year and since the modest beginning The Wellspring has supported 350 people who have moved into their own housing, all of whom were sleeping rough on the streets. The project was originally housed temporarily in an old scout hut but after continual fund-raising soon hopes to move into a brand new building. This is only possible due to Stockport Council allowing The Wellspring to have some land in the middle of Stockport at peppercorn rent.

From the questions and the discussion that followed several points were made:

- Practical help can always be given by working at The Wellspring (there are never quite enough volunteers), by donating groceries (most of their tins for the year come from Harvest Festivals at churches and schools throughout Stockport), by raising money to help with day to day running costs.

Have you a similar project in your area that helps those on the edge of our communities? This could be a soup kitchen similar to The Wellspring, a women's refuge, a furniture and clothing store, a group for asylum seekers and refugees. Do they need help?

- It is important to work with the local council. Planning needs to be collaborative. The Wellspring has been fortunate in this as from the early days health care and housing officers came regularly to the scout hut. The visitors who use such centres often have difficulty entering council offices for help and advice so it is better if the council comes to them.

- Many of the difficulties of those living in poverty are due to the structures of our society and so there is also work to be done campaigning to change these. The GET FAIR campaign featured in MouthPeace 64 is one such means. If you have not done so already you can visit their website www.getfair.org and sign up to receive updates and actions. They are hoping to organise a nationwide lobby of MPs later in the year

Other useful websites

www.church-poverty.org.uk
www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
www.emmaus.org.uk

Living Ghosts campaign for asylum seekers
Rural poverty
Rehousing and retraining homeless



DIFFERENT PASTS, SHARED FUTURE

Refugee Week 2009 15th to 21st June.

This is a UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrates the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages a better understanding between communities. Every year during Refugee Week hundreds of events are organised across the UK ranging from big music festivals and art exhibitions to political debates, film screenings, conferences, school activities, sports and community events etc. There is no specific theme. Event organisers are encouraged to work around the idea that Refugee Week is a space of *encounters* between different communities and an opportunity to use more creative ways to bring refugee experiences to wider audiences. For ideas and help organising an event see www.refugeeweek.org.uk This includes also information for teachers, youth workers and young people.

If you feel this is too much, don't be disheartened instead join in

The Simple Acts Campaign

This consists of 20 actions that can be done by anyone and that encourage us to learn and do more with refugees. Every person who joins the campaign and does a **small thing** helps to remove barriers between communities creating the kind of world we all want to live in. There is no way of knowing the exact number involved, but it is hoped to see thousands of people doing at least one small action by 2010! Just by visiting this website www.refugeeweek.org.uk you will have completed one. To give you an idea, here are a few of the acts. On the website each one has some useful suggestions for getting started.

1. Cook a dish from another country
2. Tell a child a story from another country
3. Watch a movie about refugees
4. Do a quiz about refugees
5. Say a little prayer for me
6. Read a book about exile
7. Sign off your email with a note about refugees
8. Find out 5 facts about refugees
9. Share a cup of tea with a refugee
10. Visit a Refugee Week event

DIARY DATES

MARCH

3 "Shared Interest": Coffee Evening and Talk by speaker from Shared Interest co-operative lending society, 7.30pm at Hoole URC, Hoole Rd Chester. Organised by URC & CWDF. Tickets £1. Details 01244 400906.

6 CAFOD Lent Fast Day Contact CAFOD 020 7733 7900 or CAFOD Shrewsbury 01244 677594.
www.cafod.org.uk

6 Women's World Day of Prayer "In Christ There are Many Members Yet One Body", prepared by the women of Papua New Guinea. Contact WWDP 01892 541411
www.wwdp-natcomm.org

6 'The Great Africa Scandal' Showing of broadcaster and theologian Robert Beckford's film on how the current trade system penalises the global poor. 7.30pm in the Lecture Theatre at Grosvenor Museum, Grosvenor St Chester. Contact 01244 400906.

7 Shrewsbury Catholic Youth are holding "The confirmation Catechist Seminar", at St Thomas More, Catholic High School, Crewe. from 10am—3.30pm. During the day Anna Field CAFOD Youth Resources Co-ordinator will be introducing CAFOD's new resources/ materials prepared for confirmation groups.

15 29th Annual Romero Mass 9.30am followed by Northern launch of CAFOD's Climate Justice campaign and a shared lunch. St Helen's, Crosby. See page 7

16 CAFOD's Climate justice campaign new phase launch at Shrewsbury Cathedral. See page 7

16 Lecture by Professor Marc Ellis, the distinguished Jewish theologian 6.30pm at the Anglican Cathedral, Liverpool. For further information contact janet.davis@ctlconnect.co.uk

23 Ecumenical Worship inspired by the **Iona Community** *Fencing in God's People* Trinity Church, Newport, 6.30pm. Contact John Fowler 01952 812458
www.iona.org.uk

24 Service to commemorate Archbishop Oscar Romero 7.30pm St Margaret Ward, Cherry Lane, Sale M33 5WL. Contact Fr Ned Wall 0161-962-4444.

28 Faith Doing Justice Spirituality Day led by Susy Brouard (CAFOD) at Evron Centre Stockport. Limited space so booking essential. Contact Joan.

28 "Put People First" Rally in London. See page 2

APRIL

4 St Thomas Fund for the Homeless Speaker: Fr Mark, Greyfriars College, Oxford. Arranged by Chester Newman Assn. 7.30pm at 4 Hamilton Street, Chester, CH2 3JG.

12 Easter Sunday

26 Ecumenical Worship inspired by the **Iona Community** *Activism or Contemplation* St Nicholas Church, Newport, 6.30pm. Contact see March 23

MAY

9 The Changing Face of Britain St Thomas More Catholic High School, Crewe. Contact Joan. See page 5

10 – 16 Christian Aid Week: www.caweek.org

11 How about a journey to Jacob's Well? Life in the West Bank Rosemary Read worker in Palestine 2004 and 2008. Arranged by Manchester & North Cheshire Newman Assn, St Benedict's Church Hall Handforth Visitors welcome 7.30 pm Eucharist, 8.15 pm talk. Contact Chris Quirke 0161 941 1707

17-23 National Ethical Investment Week See page 4

22– 24 "Prayer and Peace for the Holy Land." Liverpool J&P retreat at Loyola Hall. See page 8

JUNE

13 Mass of Thanksgiving for the work of CAFOD and its supporters in Shrewsbury Diocese, celebrated by Bishop Brian, Our Lady and The Apostles, Stockport 10.30am. There will be refreshments afterwards in the Parish Hall where there will also be a CAFOD speaker. Everyone welcome.

15—25 Refugee Week See page 11

25 June – 4 July Noah's Barge along Leeds Liverpool Canal See page 7

JULY

4 Welcome Barge to Albert Dock Liverpool and Climate Change Rally See page 7

12 Sea Sunday www.apostleshipofthe sea.org

17- 19 National J & P Conference at Swanwick "On the Road Together: A~Mazed by Migration"
www.justice-and-peace.org.uk

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Don't forget to send in
reports of events
and dates for the diary

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