

The monthly e-bulletin for the North West, linked to the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), is produced jointly by the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Please send diary dates to anneoc980@hotmail.com
Download earlier bulletins at: <http://jpshrewsbury.wordpress.com/e-bulletins/>

100,000 CHILDREN HIT BY BENEFIT SANCTIONS LAST YEAR - TIME TO RETHINK SANCTIONS

If you commit a crime, no criminal court in the UK is allowed to make you go hungry as a punishment. But if you're late for an appointment at the Jobcentre, they can remove all your income and leave you unable to feed yourself or your family for weeks at a time. *"During the first three weeks of my sanction I continued to look for work as I was required to. By the fourth week however I was exhausted, unwell and no longer had it in me. I was not eating as I had no food and was losing a lot of weight. I told the Jobcentre I was unwell through not eating but was sanctioned for another three months for not looking for work properly."* James

James (not his real name), one of the people whose stories of benefit sanctions feature in a new church report ***Time to Rethink Benefit Sanctions***, from a coalition of major UK churches and Church Action on Poverty, reveals that in 2013-14, around 100,000 children were affected by benefit sanctions, and a total of nearly seven million weeks of sanctions were handed out. The new data and stories of sanctions were also featured in ***Dispatches***, broadcast on **Channel 4** on 2 March. Most people in this country would be shocked if they knew that, far from providing a safety net, our benefits system is making thousands of people destitute. As Christians we believe that everyone is loved, valued and made in the image of God. We have a responsibility to challenge any structure or system that undermines this dignity.

Church Action on Poverty is calling for a full and independent review of the sanctions regime, and for urgent reform of the hardship payments system to avoid the deliberate imposition of hunger. In the meantime, we are urging the Government to suspend all sanctions against families with children and those suffering from mental health problems. Most importantly, the culture of enforcement and punishment must change to one of assistance and support.

Find out more at: <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/rethinksanctions> or go to: <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/21476>

Watch a 3.20 minute clip of heart-breaking stories: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM5xmwL6t80#t=173>

Download the March issue of ***Sparkle*** for more on the benefit sanctions campaign, our new fuel poverty resource, news from Scotland on the Poverty Premium, a Franciscan prayer, and a report on political action to tackle high-cost lenders.
<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sparkle/201503>

- **Liverpool City Council** has just published the ***Getting By*** report which chronicles the experiences of 30 families where one or both parents were in low paid employment. The research techniques used were extensive interviews conducted regularly throughout a year and analysis of spending diaries that tracked their income and expenditure. This remarkable piece of work can be read at <http://liverpool.gov.uk/media/1099304/getting-by-final-doc-for-web.pdf> The executive summary can be read at <http://liverpool.gov.uk/media/1099213/getting-by-exec-summary.pdf>

CHURCH AGENCIES SAY BUDGET FAILS THE POOREST AND CALL FOR TAX DODGING BILL

Church agencies have expressed their disappointment at the **March Budget**, which they say will hurt the most vulnerable people in the UK and overseas. **Helen O'Brien**, Chief Executive of **Caritas Social Action Network** (CSAN) which represents 41 Catholic charities in England and Wales, said: "whilst the increased funds for Church agencies for children's mental health services and support for small charities through Gift Aid regulations are welcome, significant further cuts for welfare and public spending in this year's Budget Statement will fail to stop the squeeze on the most vulnerable. If you look beyond the headlines, recent tax and welfare changes have hit the poorest households hard."

Christian Aid said it sees little in the UK Chancellor's Budget, or the European Commission's new plan on tax transparency, to make a difference to the tax dodging which drains billions from developing countries every year. The Chancellor has announced a string of measures on tax avoidance and evasion but Christian Aid believes that to really close the net on big companies avoiding their fair share of tax, the UK should introduce a comprehensive **Tax Dodging Bill**. "We are pleased to see politicians trying to tackle rampant tax dodging," said Joseph Stead, Christian Aid's Senior Economic Justice Adviser. "However, at all the points at which both UK and EU could have decided to help developing countries, they flunked it. In relation to tax dodging, the UK and EU appear to believe that we are not all in it together - developing countries are on their own."

On the Government's plans to introduce country-by-country reporting requirements for multinational companies, firms should have publicly to report the information. Failure to do this means few developing countries will benefit from the information being given to the UK's tax authority. "Keeping this crucial information hidden from public eyes means that developing countries are never going to get the information they need to tackle tax dodging," warned Mr Stead. However, Christian Aid is hopeful that further UK Government plans to introduce a new criminal offence of helping others to evade tax could make a difference for people living in poverty in developing countries. **Read more** at: <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=26996>

DIRTY MONEY

The international campaigning and advocacy organisation **ONE** is calling for the Bank for International Settlements to release its recent data on money held in tax havens which would be invaluable in the fight against corruption. Sign the petition now at: http://act.one.org/sign/follow_the_money/?referring_akid=.5537615.h_Yp6Z&source=taf

LETTER TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE ARMS TRADE

John Dowling writes: I'm co-ordinating a group of people who have offered to write, on 2 or 3 occasions every year, to the Prime Minister or the minister responsible for UK arms exports in support of CAAT campaigns. The first of these letters follows. It deals with the recent Security & Policing conference at Farnborough. The minister in question is currently Matthew Hancock. The procedure for these letters is that they should be sent to your MP at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA and s/he should be asked to pass it on to Mr. Hancock. The letter is based on an article by Andrew Smith, spokesperson for CAAT at http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/andrew-smith/uk-arms-industry_b_6809200.html Please personalise it if you can.

After sending the letter you will get a response from Mr. Hancock which will include the phrase "The UK operates one of the most rigorous and transparent arms export regimes in the world." I have been writing letters on this subject for over 10 years and that sentence has appeared in every response. These letters are not going to change the world but they are part of the constant pressure that will hopefully eventually bring about incremental change. Please forward to anyone else who may be interested. With best wishes, John Dowling jjthegeordie@outlook.com

*Matthew Hancock MP, Minister of State for Business, Enterprise and Energy,
Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 1 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET*

Dear Mr Hancock

Between 10 and 12 March 2015, the Security & Policing conference and exhibition took place at Farnborough. This event brought together some of the world's largest arms companies with some of the worst human rights abusers. The conference is a UK government sponsored event and in recent years it has been attended by representatives of the regimes in Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

You will be aware that it's not just standard policing equipment that was on view at this conference. The security equipment being marketed included sniper rifles, crowd control equipment and surveillance technology. The show has helped to arm repressive regimes with exactly the kind of equipment that has been, and is being used, across the world to suppress protests and silence opposition. The guests and the equipment aren't the only problem; the exhibitors themselves have enabled a long list of human rights violations.

However, it's not just arms and surveillance equipment that are sold to these regimes, it's also political legitimacy. Security & Policing is supported politically, financially and logistically by the UK government, and the countries that send delegates do so, in part, because it strengthens their political links and it sends out the signal that the UK supports what they are doing.

Far from keeping us secure, events like this only strengthen the UK's ties to brutal dictatorships and entrench the government's role as a global arms seller. Furthermore, they undermine the UK's political credibility on human rights and strengthen the position of repressive regimes. Most importantly they put weapons and surveillance equipment in the hands of dangerous people and endanger the lives, security and human rights of those living under oppression.

GOVERNMENT MILITARY PROPAGANDA IN THE CLASSROOM

ForcesWatch together with **Quaker Peace & Social Witness**, have launched a critique against the Government's 'learning resource' about the UK armed forces (3/3/15). The report and video examines ***The British Armed Forces Learning Resource*** (published in September 2014 by the Prime Minister's Office and promoted to schools by the Department for Education) and finds that it is:

- a poor quality educational resource, unsuitable for many of those it is aimed at (pupils aged 5 to 16)
- politically-driven
- aims to promote recruitment into the armed forces and 'military ethos' in schools
- is a sanitised view of war, glorifies 'military values' & provides no room for debate on alternatives to armed conflict
- presents a partial and uncritical history of British involvement in war, ignoring debate over the morality and legacy of such conflicts

The report concludes: *'The 'British Armed Forces: Learning Resource 2014' should not be used in schools as a learning resource, or should only be used in conjunction with alternative materials, and it should not be promoted as a learning resource by third parties....Furthermore, we consider that the document amounts to political interference in children's education. The Department of Education is failing in its legal duty, under the Education Act of 1996, to safeguard children from the promotion of partisan political views within schools and to offer a balanced presentation of opposing views.'*

Read the ForcesWatch report <http://www.forceswatch.net/content/armed-forces-learning-resource>

Watch a 5.42 minute film on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wB9JD6P1RCM&feature=youtu.be> made by Quaker Peace & Social Witness

Find out more from Ekklesia at: <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/21479>

UK FAITH LEADERS CALL FOR NEW APPROACH TO ELIMINATE NUCLEAR ARSENALS

Twenty-six faith leaders from eight faith traditions, among them Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, Archbishop of Liverpool and National President of Pax Christi, have signed a statement in advance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference meetings scheduled for April urging nuclear weapons states, of which the UK is one, and the international community, to develop a robust plan of action that will lead us to a world free of nuclear weapons.

Pat Gaffney, General Secretary of Pax Christi commented: "We should be encouraged by this initiative which expresses deeply held values of people of faith that peace and security cannot be found in the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons. It indicates that our skills and resources must be redirected to a pursuit of non-nuclear approaches to security for the people and planet. In his message to the Vienna Conference on Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, Pope Francis made it clear that 'now is the time to counter the logic of fear with the ethic of responsibility, and so foster a climate of trust and sincere dialogue'."

The statement was accompanied by a letter published on Sunday 15 March in *The Times* signed by Most Rev Malcolm McMahon, Archbishop of Liverpool, Maulana Shahid Raza, founder trustee, British Muslim Forum; Bharti Taylor, executive director, Hindu Forum of Europe; Lord Indarjit Singh of Wimbledon, director, Network of Sikh Organisations, Ven B Seelawimala, head priest, London Buddhist Vihara.

The statement has been developed and co-ordinated by Religions for Peace UK, Pax Christi UK and a range of Churches and other faith groups. It says: "Nuclear weapons are by their nature indiscriminate in their effect. Any use of nuclear weapons would have devastating humanitarian consequences, be incompatible with International Humanitarian Law and violate the principle of dignity for every human being that is common to each of our faith traditions. Our world faces many challenges including oppressive poverty, climate change, violent extremism and emerging national rivalry. Addressing these challenges requires strong relationships across nations, founded on mutual co-operation, trust and shared prosperity. Security policies based on the threat of the use of nuclear weapons are immoral and ultimately self-defeating. We must move beyond the division of our world into nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states and ensure that all states make good their commitment to negotiations on the universal, legally verifiable and enforceable elimination of nuclear weapons. We call on all nuclear weapon states to join in this endeavour. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference begins next month, and we urge nuclear weapons states, and the international community, to develop a robust plan of action that will lead us to a world free of nuclear weapons. "

Read the full list of signatories here: <http://www.endnuclearweapons.org.uk/signatories.htm>

PAX CHRISTI LAUNCH GENERAL ELECTION BRIEFING

Britain's involvement in the global arms trade, the Renewal of Trident and Britain's role in the world are just some of the issues explored in the new General Election Briefing produced by Pax Christi and other Christian Peace Groups. Aimed at Christians throughout the country the Briefing reminds readers that "Christians are called to be peacemakers; to love not just our neighbours but also our enemies... We believe we are called to work for a world where unbridled human greed, violence and animosity towards the 'other' are no longer acceptable in a civilised society".

Pat Gaffney of **Pax Christi** who was involved in writing the Briefing said: "We hope that this resource will support our members and others who are preparing to question prospective candidates for the 2015 General Election. For us in Pax Christi this means putting questions about our commitment building peace in our world clearly on the election agenda. We need to explore non-military approaches to security and challenge the huge amounts that are spent in military intervention, on Trident and on trading in arms around the world. This money could be redirected towards the real threats to security: poverty and climate change." In the weeks ahead thousands of these Briefings will be sent to individuals, Chaplaincies, parishes and groups with ideas on how they might set up meetings or interviews with Candidates and engage in debate about Gospel values and a commitment to the common good. **Read here:** <http://paxchristi.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Final-NCPO-Election-.pdf>

LEADERSHIP AND VISION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

- Isn't an Election a moment when we express our vision of what we want our society to grow into?
- Do we want to grow towards greater community, or greater individual autonomy?

A vision of a healthy civil society, where human dignity and the common good are at the heart of decision-making, appeals to the best of our nature. It sparkles with life and soul, is more nuanced than the binary utilitarian dullness of either statism or marketisation. A re-humanising of our ways of doing things is what is needed, where the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity are built into our relationships, where our competence is infused with compassion, where every person is valued. Such a vision requires the whole nation to get involved in a radically inclusive agenda that cultivates conscience, virtue and responsibility, respect for each other's traditions, and nurtures growth towards greater community. www.togetherforthecommongood.co.uk

A wealth of election resources focusing on building a healthy civil society for the common good can be downloaded at: <http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=77a7bd7701def6d784260b532&id=926c76cf64&e=b30a4185a8>

AGENCIES RUSH TO AID DEVASTATED VANUATU, CALL FOR ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The devastation caused by Cyclone Pam to Vanuatu in the Pacific on 13 and 14 March has provoked an immediate humanitarian response from Christian agencies and calls for urgent action on climate change - **Ellen Teague** writes in the *Tablet on-line*. CAFOD, Christian Aid and Tearfund have launched appeals, advocacy actions and prayer alerts.

At least eight people are known to have been killed - a figure set to rise as remote islands are contacted - amid winds of more than 170 mph and destructive storm surges around eight metres high. People sheltered in churches and schools as Cyclone Pam hit land on the most populated island of Efate, which includes the capital Port Vila, and where more than 65,000 people live. A state of emergency has been declared in the tiny state of 267,000 people which is spread over 65 islands.

Read Ellen Teague's full report here: <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/1872/0/agencies-rush-to-support-devastated-vanuatu-as-calls-intensify-for-rich-nations-to-take-climate-change-seriously>

BISHOP 'APPALLED' AT UKIP PLAN TO EXCLUDE IMMIGRANT CHILDREN FROM SCHOOLS

Bishop Pat Lynch, chair of the Bishops' Conference office for migration, has expressed his grave concern at UKIP's policy to exclude immigrant children from UK state schools for their first five years of living here. A statement on the UKIP website says that immigrants and their dependants would need private education for five years after entering the UK. Questioned on this, UKIP leader Nigel Farage said it was a difficult issue but his personal view was that immigrants should not even be allowed to bring their children here, for a period of time. Once they were here, they should not be allowed to attend state schools for five years, he said.

Bishop Pat Lynch commented: "The UK has a long, proud and humane tradition of responding to the needs of immigrants' children. It is proven that education is a key element in integrating diverse communities. I recognise that in some places there are strains on resource but as a society we need to respond to this need rather than scapegoating any one group. I am appalled by any suggestion of discriminating against immigrants."

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=26972>

REGISTER NOW TO LIVE BELOW THE LINE FOR PROGRESSIO

Live Below the Line is back in 2015. Official registration is now open for this unique and inspiring challenge! Could you take on this act of solidarity with people living in poverty by spending only £1 a day on all your food and drink for five days? The official challenge week is **27 April - 1 May**, but you can shape the challenge around your schedule and choose a different week to suit you. Once you've registered, you will receive plenty of information to support and inspire you through the challenge, as well as advice from us as part of Team Progressio! Go to: https://www.livebelowtheline.com/uk/users/sign_up?partner=progressio

POPE FRANCIS ANNOUNCES HOLY YEAR OF MERCY

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is a journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an extraordinary Jubilee that is to have the mercy of God at its centre. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (cf. Lk 6:36)" This Holy Year will begin on this coming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will end on November 20, 2016, the Sunday dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe - and living face of the Father's mercy. **Read more at:** <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=26968>

JEAN VANIER WINS THE 2015 TEMPLETON PRIZE

Jean Vanier, the founder of **L'Arche**, a revolutionary international network of communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers, has won the **2015 Templeton Prize**.

L'Arche encourages people toward mutually transformative relationships, where those who help are transformed by those they encounter. Vanier discovered that those people who society typically considers the weakest enable the strong to recognise and welcome their own vulnerability. What began quietly in northern France in 1964, when Vanier invited two intellectually disabled men to come and live with him as friends, has now grown into 147 L'Arche residential communities operating in 35 countries, and more than 1,500 Faith and Light support groups in 82 countries that similarly urge solidarity among people with and without disabilities.

Vanier, 86, has extended his advocacy of belonging and social justice, with years of leadership efforts across the globe to nurture dialogue and unity among Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and other faiths through lectures, conferences and retreats around the world. His scholarship includes more than 30 books translated into 29 languages. Vanier's five decades of living with deeply vulnerable people have led him to an understanding of weakness and common humanity. This learned wisdom reflects the essence of the Big Questions that have become a hallmark of the Prize and continue the legacy of its founder Sir John Templeton, the late global investor and philanthropist, in encouraging and recognising spiritual progress. In videos available on the Prize website, www.templetonprize.org, Vanier examines topics including the potential transformative power revealed through the practice and struggle of love, and "What does it mean to be fully human?"

"To become fully human is to let down the barriers, to open up and discover that every person is beautiful. Under all the jobs you're doing, responsibilities, there is you," Vanier answers, adding, "And you, at the heart of who you are, you're somebody also crying out, 'does somebody love me?' Not just for what I can do, but for who I am."

In remarks prepared for the announcement of the award, Vanier made a plea for global peace. "Before being Christians or Jews or Muslims, before being Americans or Russians or Africans, before being generals or priests, rabbis or imams, before having visible or invisible disabilities, we are all human beings with hearts capable of loving."

Jennifer Simpson, the daughter of Foundation president and chairman Dr. John M. Templeton, Jr. and granddaughter of Sir John Templeton, noted that Vanier brought a much-needed perspective to how the power of love can advance spiritual progress in the world. "By recognizing the importance of every individual, regardless of their station in life, Jean Vanier underscores how each of us has the ability not only to lift up others, but also ourselves," she said. "His powerful message and practice of love has the potential to change the world for the better, just as it has already changed the lives of countless individuals who have been touched by this extraordinary man."

Jean Vanier joins a distinguished group of 44 former recipients, including Mother Teresa, who received the inaugural Prize award in 1973, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1983), and Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2007). Last year's Templeton Prize recipient, Czech priest and philosopher Tomáš Halík, followed Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, in 2013 and the 2012 Templeton Laureate, the Dalai Lama.

Vanier, who continues to live on the grounds of the original L'Arche community in Trosly-Breuil, north of Paris, will be formally awarded the Templeton Prize at a public ceremony at the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields in London on Monday, May 18.

Read more at: <http://jerichotree.com/2015/03/17/jean-vanier-wins-the-2015-templeton-prize/>

BOOK REVIEW *Finding Mr Goldman: a parable* by David Rhodes

Anne O'Connor writes: *A pacy story that pulls together the burning issues facing today's world: the wealth of a few at the expense of many; the exploitation of the poor; prejudice; disease and suffering; the devastating effects of climate change and much more, in an intriguing narrative. I loved David Rhodes' Sparrow Story - easily the best and most imaginative take on the gospel story I've ever read. Finding Mr Goldman is another triumph: I couldn't put it down! A marvelous way into the complexities of justice and peace for all ages and a wake-up call to be more aware of the impact of our actions - essential reading!*

Harry Goldman is a ruthless capitalist, concerned only with amassing more and more wealth. He gives no thought to the consequences of his greed and, like the rich man in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, sees the beggar Sheppard at his gate as an embarrassing eye-sore to be removed from his property, by force if necessary. In a sudden dramatic turn of events Goldman discovers that his wealth counts for nothing. He is forced to confront his past deeds in an attempt to evade damnation, with the mysterious Sheppard as his companion and help-mate.

For the first part of their journey the unlikely friends try to carry as much of Goldman's riches as they can manage into the next world. But the heavy bags cut into Goldman's hands and weigh him down spiritually as well as physically. In a series of encounters with the poor and down-trodden Goldman learns that we are all connected and that his materialistic and self-indulgent actions may have had dire repercussions for people he has never met; the success of his empire has come at a high cost for others. Supported by Sheppard, Goldman tries to make amends but he gradually discovers that it is not as easy as merely saying sorry or giving away a wad of banknotes. The people he comes across teach him an essential truth: compassion and respect for the dignity of a fellow human are worth infinitely more than material possessions.

Throughout his life Goldman has shied away from the concepts of love and dependency, choosing instead to prove to others and, perhaps more importantly, to himself, that success can only be measured in terms of achievement and worldly riches. The further they travel the more Goldman begins to understand that there are no easy answers to the problems of the world; that there is no love without justice and no justice without a struggle. The novel is unequivocal in its censure of Goldman's former way of life yet ultimately it offers hope and redemption. Goldman goes almost to the brink of despair but is pulled back in time to truly appreciate how much he is loved. This modern parable can be read on two levels: as a personal journey of discovery towards forgiveness and redemption through the eyes of faith and also as a critique of today's capitalist dog-eat-dog society. It invites the reader to question much of what we may hitherto have taken for granted and to acknowledge that material success or a cheap bargain comes at a cost to someone else.

Available from **SPCK** www.spckpublishing.co.uk in paperback format or as an e-book, this fast-moving and challenging novel is the latest book from David Rhodes, former journalist and parish priest and author of the newly extended **Faith in Dark Places, Advent Adventure, Lenten Adventure** and **Sparrow Story**, all published by SPCK. His extensive work among homeless people led to the innovative **Retreats on the Streets** <http://www.columbans.eu/index.php/mission/action/258-retreat-on-the-street> He blogs at www.turbulentbooks.co.uk and tweets @RhodesWriter.

JUSTICE AND PEACE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Kevin Burr writes: There are three ways to pray the Stations of the Cross. The first, and time-honoured way, is to follow Jesus' steps, to read the Scriptures, and to reflect on Jesus' suffering and his response to it and to those around him. Jesus invites us to follow him. The second, is to pray about and reflect on those times when we have walked our own path of suffering, our own Calvary, and we invite, even implore Jesus to be close to us, to walk with us. And the third way, very much promoted by St John Paul II, and Pope Francis, is to walk in solidarity with others, both near and far, who we know are suffering their own Calvaries in various ways. We invite Jesus to be with us, and them along their hard road. This text by Anne O'Connor, liturgist and peace campaigner (with additional material from Kevin), helps us pray in all three ways:

- Please allow a few moments of silent reflection between each reading and before and after the responses (follow example for Station 1).

1. Jesus is condemned to death

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

The crowd who once hung on his every word now turn against Jesus, stirred up by self-righteous religious leaders desperate to rid themselves of a trouble-maker who is constantly challenging them. Pilate can find no valid reason to condemn Jesus but is swayed by the bloodthirsty mob. Soldiers beat him and mock our redeemer.

Silent reflection

Mob mentality still flourishes in our midst today: hostility towards immigrants and other minority groups whipped up by extreme factions who claim to protect the nation's best interest. Do we have the courage to challenge them? Our health services only continue to function because of dedicated immigrant workers. *Silent Reflection*

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

2. Jesus carries the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Betrayed by a kiss. Sold for 30 silver coins –Denied three times over by a beloved disciple. Pierced by a crown of thorns. And now this: the cross, an agonising burden on bloodied shoulders; no easy place to grip the rough and jagged wood.

It's easy to turn our backs on the problems of others; to convince ourselves it's nothing to do with us. The poor and unemployed are labelled 'benefit scroungers' and written off as being to blame for their troubles.

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

3. Jesus falls for the first time

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Pushed roughly along by the jeering soldiers; stumbling blindly; flung to the ground; flesh torn and bloody; searing pain. Humiliated and broken: the God of love, carrying the weight of our indifference.

One law for the rich and powerful; another for the poor and downtrodden; the weak exploited by the strong. It's not who you are but who you know that counts and how much you can afford to pay. Do those of us who are rich even know a poor person let alone offer them hospitality?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

4. Jesus comes face to face with his mother

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Watching and waiting: a helpless bystander. Even a mother's love powerless to prevent what is to come. A sword pierces her heart.

There can be few worse torments than seeing your child suffer and die. For the families of hostages mercilessly tortured and executed without warning the pain is unimaginable. For the families of young people enticed away by grooming or radicalisation, the anguish and heart-searching is crushing.

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

5. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Press-ganged by the soldiers to help carry the cross, reluctant at first to get involved, Simon shows kindness and compassion to someone in desperate need. An overseas visitor, possibly a black African, steps in to help where none of Jesus' followers dared.

Am I supporting my wider church community to provide food, shelter and friendship for those who find themselves homeless: migrants; asylum seekers; ex-prisoners; young people who can no longer stay in a violent or abusive home situation?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Moved to pity by Jesus' plight. Not stopping to think how the soldiers might react; no time to worry about her own safety; Veronica gently wipes his face; eases his suffering with a loving gesture; a simple act of kindness in a world bound up in cruelty and hate.

Could we do more to make newcomers welcome in our community? Do we take time to chat to the Big Issue vendor or offer a warm drink on a cold day? Are elderly or lonely people respected and well cared for in your neighbourhood?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

7. Jesus falls for the second time

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Weak from the beatings; struggling to pick himself up and carry on, Jesus shares in the hopelessness and misery endured by so many. 'Not my will' Jesus had said in his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane to his Father, 'but thy will be done'. He's not going to give up easily.

Trying desperately to make ends meet; forced to turn to food banks to feed the family; parents going hungry when there isn't enough to go round. Are we open enough, generous enough, to step forward to help those in need?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

8. The women of Jerusalem weep for Jesus

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Hearts bursting with sorrow; desolation that knows no bounds. A suffering not understood in human terms. The ultimate sacrifice: a perfect act of love to redeem a fallen world. In response to them Jesus says 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children.'

Victims of civil war, traumatised and broken, rely on the kindness of others. Victims of domestic violence in our own local community need practical help and compassion too. How can we show our love to them?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

9. Jesus falls for the third time

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Yet another fall, this time worse than the two before. Scarcely enough strength to get up again. Truly a man of sorrows: bruised and broken; despised, crushed and pitiful. A lamb led to the slaughter, never even opening his mouth in rebuke. Simon steps nearer to Jesus to carry more of the weight of the heavy cross; he offers Jesus the last words of loving encouragement he will hear.

It seems the rich get richer, at the expense of the poor. Those at the bottom of the pile are tempted to take out exorbitant pay-day loans to simply survive whilst city bankers receive five figure bonuses.

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Pitilessly taunted; mocked as a king; stripped to nothing. All trappings of dignity roughly torn away: the very opposite of worldly power and majesty. For a few moments, freed from the weight of those heavy beams, Jesus gathers the last reserves of human strength as he prepares himself for his last act of laying down his life for his friends.

Vulnerable young people suffer cruelly at the hands of cyber bullies. In despair, they may self-harm or even take their own lives. How can we show them that they are valued and cherished and help them find a way through?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

11. Jesus is nailed to the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

A man, no not just a man, our precious Saviour, nailed to a cross. At each shattering blow of the hammers, explosions of pain in wrists and ankles; a slow, agonising torture, unable to support himself without piercing pain, suspended in a position where every breath was a struggle, in the heat of the mid-day sun. All the time in silent prayer to His Father in heaven, not for himself but for us.

Ethnic cleansing; mindless violence; murder; torture; rape; gun crimes on the streets; a lack of care and respect for God's wonderful creation. The Big Society is failing: community spirit is at a low ebb. How can we bring people together to build bridges between different groups and celebrate our common aims and desires?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

12. Jesus dies on the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Such a dreadful way to die: the mouth on fire with an unbearable thirst: lips parched and dry. A drink is offered – vinegar – bitter tasting and sour; smarting against cut lips. The bitter vinegar like the bitterness of the mob who clamoured for his blood. The end is near. The sky darkens. 'Into your hands I commend my Spirit.' It is finished.

Governments and manufacturers profit from selling arms to oppressive regimes yet basic services suffer cuts. Money that could be used for the good of all goes into stockpiling weapons of war and destruction. How can we halt this damaging spiral?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

13. Jesus is taken down from the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Joseph of Arimathea was a secret follower of Jesus, afraid to let his allegiance be known. After Jesus was put to death his courage grew and he went to Pilate to ask for the body. Torn between tenderness for Jesus and fear of the soldiers, his trembling disciples lift Jesus from the place of his execution.

Inspired by Joseph, we can let go of the fear of what others might say or think and focus on doing what we know to be right. By putting the needs of the weakest members of our society before our own, we can begin to confront injustice.

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

A race against time to finish the burial preparations before the Sabbath. Joseph and Nicodemus prepare an empty tomb for Jesus' body; wrap it in a clean burial garment; place it in the tomb and roll a large stone over the entrance to prevent anyone disturbing it.

We too are in a race against time to protect our planet for future generations. Despite clear proof that our consumer life-style is causing irreparable damage, many choose to ignore the warnings. Can we resolve to live more simply, using energy more efficiently, re-using and recycling where possible, so that all, especially those in regions prone to cyclones, drought, and rising sea levels, can look to the future with hope?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

Let us complete our journey with Our Lord by thoughtfully praying:
The prayer Our Lord taught us
The prayer to Our Lord's mother, Mary
Our prayer of praise to the Blessed Trinity

JUSTICE AND PEACE CALENDAR

4 April United Nations' Mine Awareness Day

The United Nations' International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action is observed on April 4 each year. The day aims to raise awareness about landmines and progress toward their eradication. The term 'mine action' refers to a range of efforts to clear landmines and explosive remnants of war and to mark and fence off dangerous areas. It also includes assisting victims, teaching people how to remain safe in a mine-affected environment, advocating for universal participation in international treaties related to landmines, explosive remnants of war and their victims, and destroying landmines stockpiled by governments and non-state armed groups.

On 8 December 2005, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared that April 4 of each year would be officially proclaimed and observed as International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. It was first observed on April 4, 2006. According to the *Landmine Monitor Report 2005*, 84 countries were affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance, which together kill or maim between 15,000 and 20,000 adults and children annually. The UN works together with countries to find and destroy these devices.

www.un.org/en/events/mineawarenessday/

13 April Global Day of Action on Military Spending UK

It's a scandal that 1 in 4 children in the UK grow up in poverty. It's outrageous that thirteen times more people are relying on foodbanks to survive than did five years ago. It's all the more scandalous when you realise that the UK's military spending is among the highest in the world – £38,000 million in 2014. In the same year we spent £12,000 million on overseas aid, a mere £3,100 million on energy and climate change and only £1,360 million on diplomacy through the FCO. It's time to shift priorities. Take action with people across the world to challenge military spending on the Global Day of Action – 13 April 2015. <http://demilitarize.org.uk>

Resources include a **General Election Briefing Pack** put together by the Network of Christian Peace Organisations including Pax Christi, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Campaign Against Arms Trade Christian Network, Quaker Peace and Social Witness and Franciscan Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation: <http://demilitarize.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Final-NCPO-Election-.pdf>

22 April International Mother Earth Day

International Mother Earth Day recognises that the Earth and its ecosystems provide its inhabitants with life and sustenance. It also aims to raise awareness that humans have a collective responsibility to promote harmony with nature and to balance the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations.

<http://www.un.org/en/events/motherearthday/>

'Mother Earth' is an ancient concept common to many languages and cultures, acknowledging our connection to the planet which sustains and nurtures us. You could use International Mother Earth Day as a prompt to explore these concepts or simply to reflect on how our planet nurtures us and how we can care for it in return.

<http://globaldimension.org.uk/calendar/event/5526>

1 May Feast of St Joseph the Worker

The Feast of St Joseph the Worker is also the anniversary of the founding of the Catholic Worker Movement by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933 in the US. Funded entirely by donations and run by workers who accept no pay but choose to live in a spirit of voluntary poverty, the Catholic Worker Movement in the UK offers hospitality, advocacy and friendship to destitute men and women (some with children), many of whom are refugees.

www.londoncatholicworker.org

What we would like to do is change the world – make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute – the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words – we can, to a certain extent, change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, there is nothing we can do but love, and, dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbour, to love our enemy as our friend.

Dorothy Day

A society that "does not pay a just wage", that "does not give work" to people; a society that "that only looks to its balance books, that only seeks profit" is unjust and goes against God. It is work - not power, not money, not culture – that gives men and women a sense of dignity. By stripping them of work, society strips them of their God given dignity.

Pope Francis

10-16 May Christian Aid Week

Held every year since 1957, Christian Aid Week is Britain's longest-running fundraising week to support projects in developing countries with a focus on tackling poverty. Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. There are plenty of ways your church can get involved this Christian Aid Week:

- **House-to-house collections** raise almost £9m across the UK every year – a perfect opportunity to get your church out into your community while demonstrating God's heart for the poor.
- **Turn fun into funds:** whether it's a sponsored walk, a BBQ or a cake sale, we've got plenty of ideas to bring people together and have fun while raising money for our work!
- **Christian Aid Sunday service and collection:** why not dedicate your service on Sunday 10 or 17 May to learning what the Bible says about poverty and justice? Download films, prayers, sermon notes and Sunday school activities. <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/christianaidweek/index.aspx>

15 May Conscientious Objectors Day

Celebrated on 15 May every year this day raises awareness of those who refuse to participate in armed conflict for moral or religious reasons. There were about 16,000 conscientious objectors (COs) in World War One. The Peace Pledge Union have produced an information briefing about conscientious objection and peace activism in the First World War entitled ***Opposing World War One: Courage and Conscience.***

<http://www.ppu.org.uk/OpposingWorldWarOne.pdf> <http://www.coproject.org.uk/>

11-15 May Walk to Work Week

Walk to Work Week is part of **National Walking Month**, an annual campaign run by **Living Streets** which promotes walking for all. Living Streets is a national charity that stands up for pedestrians, working with local communities to create safe, attractive, enjoyable streets where it's great to walk. Every May we encourage people to feel the benefits of walking: burn calories and get fitter; blow away the cobwebs and relieve stress; go for a stroll together or walk the kids to school; make new discoveries in your area; save your travel fare; cut your environmental footprint.

Create your online profile now to be a part of our free workplace walking challenge week starting Monday 11 May. Join or create a workplace team and get competitive with colleagues using our live totalisers and leaderboards to motivate you. Log any walking you do to see how many calories you are burning and how much CO₂ you save. Complete our challenges to feel the benefits of walking more and earn badges for all your achievements.

<http://www.walktoworkweek.org.uk>

18-22 MAY WALK TO SCHOOL WEEK

Every year Walk to School Week brings together nearly one million schoolchildren, teachers and parents. This year is all about the health benefits of walking. During the week, Walk to School mascot Strider will be encouraging pupils to take his 5-Day Walking Challenge – supported by our classroom-focused pack.

- 1. Healthy body** - Daily exercise has numerous physical health benefits including helping to reduce the risk of childhood obesity and medical conditions in later life such as cancer and heart disease.
- 2. Health and happiness** - Regular walking helps to keep young minds healthy and alert ready for their arrival at school.
- 3. Healthy habits** - Getting into the habit of an energetic walk at the start of the day will also encourage healthy eating habits such as having a nutritious breakfast every morning.
- 4. Healthy friends and family** - The walk to school is the perfect opportunity for some quality family time or a good chat with friends helping to develop strong, happy relationships.
- 5. Healthy environment** - And don't forget that walking rather than taking motorised transport means less pollution and cleaner air – a benefit for everyone! -

<http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/walk-with-us/walk-to-school/walk-to-school-week-18-22-may-2015#sthash.VMZdqMfS.dpuf>

21 May Feast of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter

Austrian farmer Franz Jägerstätter refused to fight for the German Army because of his opposition to the Nazi regime. He cited St. Thomas More as a key influence. Executed on 9 August 1943, he was declared a martyr and beatified in 2007.

www.paxchristi.org.uk

24 May World Day of Prayer for the Church in China

In May 2007, Pope Benedict XVI released a Letter to Chinese Catholics, in which he asked that May 24 each year be dedicated a World Day of Prayer for the Church in China. He chose May 24 because it is the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, who is venerated at the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. In honour of the first celebration of the World Day of Prayer for China, in 2008, Pope Benedict composed a prayer to Our Lady of Sheshan and asked that Christians throughout the world recite it on May 24.

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/document.php?n=1017>

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

APRIL

1 Fracking? As Christians should we have a view? Exploring our views as people of Faith. 7pm St Anthony's Church Social Club, Cadley Causeway, Preston PR2 3RX. All Welcome.

4 United Nations' Mine Awareness Day www.un.org/en/events/mineawarenessday/

11 Live A Better Life Fair Liverpool labl.org.uk/fair_liverpool.html

13 Global Day of Action on Military Spending UK <http://demilitarize.org.uk> caat.org.uk 020 7281 0297. **Pax Christi** has a lesson on military spending as part of their General RE scheme of work <http://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-education/general-re/>

15 Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount St, Manchester, M2 5NS Manchester Newman Lecture - first in new annual lecture series.

The Politics of the Common Good: What does Catholic Social Teaching have to contribute to electoral politics?

Dr Anna Rowlands Lecturer in Contemporary Catholic Theology & Deputy Director Centre for Catholic Studies, Durham University. No charge. Booking essential. Chris Quirke secretary@newman.org.uk 0161 941 1707. Coffee/tea from 6pm, lecture at 6.30pm.

16 The Housing Justice Manchester Roadshow bringing together churches, Housing Associations, local authorities and other housing organisations. An ecumenical event (in partnership with CARITAS Salford and The Booth Centre) to encourage churches to be part of the housing solution. Across the nation, homelessness and lack of decent housing have a devastating impact on lives. The introduction of welfare benefit reform has made this situation worse for many families and single people. Come and hear about the great work churches are already doing, and be inspired to make a difference. **Cathedral Centre** 3 Ford Street, M3 6DP Salford 930am-3pm.

Booking: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/housing-justice-roadshow-manchester-your-church-and-the-housing-crisis-registration-15810570843?utm_campaign=new_event_email&utm_medium=email&utm_source=eb_email&utm_term=viewmyevent_button

18 Some say 'It's never been so bad' A pre-election event to devise questions to ask candidates. The focus will be on housing and the living wage. 3-5 pm **LACE** Croxteth Drive Sefton Park Liverpool L17 1AA

18 TTIP Day of Action –a global day of action to send a big message to the government that gets into power in May that we do not want TTIP. Get in touch to get involved with an action in your area. Matthew.bramall@globaljustice.org.uk

21 VSO Cheshire Supporter Group AGM 7-9.30pm English in Chester, 9 Stanley Place Chester, CH1 2LU. 'Business' part of the evening from 7pm with a roundup of the year's events and some planning for the future, then enjoy the screening of a film, **Bamako** (Capital of Mali), based on the true incident of a private US financial consortium buying up Mali's Russian international debt at a discount and then insisting on the full amount from Mali.

21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination un.org/en/events/racialdiscriminationday/

22 Pre-Election Hustings meeting 7-9.30pm, Best Building, University of Chester, Chester Campus, Chester CH1 4BQ. As in previous General Elections, **Chester World Development Forum** will host an open meeting with the main General Election candidates, exploring their views on development issues.

28 Reading the Signs of the Times, Sacred Heart, Liverpool Rd, Ainsdale, PR8 3BP. Steve Atherton and members of Liverpool J&P Commission will lead a session on linking the gospel and our lives. This session will be offered twice: 1-3 pm and 7-9 pm

MAY

7 General Election

12 CWDF AGM 6.45-9pm The Unity Centre, Cuppin Street Chester, CH1 2BN. Following the business part of the AGM we will be hearing from our guest speakers, VSO volunteers Tricia Atherton and Margaret Park, on the theme VSO Education in Rwanda.

12 Embrace the Middle East Annual Lecture by Rowan Williams London embraceme.org/events

15 International Conscientious Objectors Day paxchristi.org.uk 020 8203 4884

16 NJPN AGM & OPEN NETWORKING DAY 10.30am-4pm CAFOD 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JB. Speaker Nick Dearden from Global Justice Now on **TTIP: A Charter for Big Business?**

JUNE

17 Climate Change rally & lobby Parliament Square, London. Mass lobby of MPs in Westminster. Climate fete: food, stalls, fun & games for all the family in a local community-feel Fair on Parliament Square. Messages from supporters on bunting. Evening rally in Trafalgar Square with high profile speakers. Simultaneous local community events. www.theclimatecoalition.org/

JULY

17-19 The Things That Make For Peace. NJPN annual conference at Swanwick to identify the real threats to human security and how we can work together to create a world without war. 020 7901 486 admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk

OCTOBER

3-4 COME & SEE 2015 Conference at Southport Keynote speaker **Sr Helen Prejean**. Sunday Mass with Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP. Booking forms with sae: Irenaeus, 32 Great Georges Rd, Liverpool L22 1RD. 0151 949 1199 jenny@irenaeus.co.uk

- Many of the items featured in this and previous bulletins are taken from the daily e bulletin Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com an invaluable free resource for up-to-date J&P news and events. Sign up too for weekly bulletins from National J&P Network www.justice-and-peace.org - contact the Administrator 020 7901 4864, admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk

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