

Shrewsbury Diocese JP&SR E-Bulletin – May 2013

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Vision: A diocese fully engaged with the call of God to be a people of justice and peace

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1. National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) and Pax Christi Joint AGM

Justice and Peace work nationally was celebrated on Saturday at the joint AGMs of the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) and Pax Christi, amidst worries that this mission is not more central to Catholic leaders in England and Wales. The day, held in London, was attended by more than 100 people from across England and Wales.

NJPN administrator Ann Kelly, expressed “concern about the loss of J&P fieldworkers in dioceses” over the past year. “J&P is not being given priority at diocesan level in many places so we are losing ready contacts at that level”. She added that “now only one diocese – Liverpool - still has a full-time fieldworker”. Ann produces a weekly roundup of campaigning information sent out to contacts. A recent NJPN survey revealed that most J&P contacts felt they did not get enough support in their dioceses and were very uncertain about the future. However, more upbeat news included the success of last year’s packed annual NJPN conference focusing on China, and places filling up for this year (19-21 July), with US theologian Megan McKenna as keynote speaker.

Pax Christi chair Ann Dodd reported “very little headway in our efforts to engage bishops on nuclear war, our paper on the use of drones, and military chaplains”. There was appreciation for Peace Sunday outreach in parishes, but the terrible weather in January 2013 has meant that a drop in income. A campaign to raise awareness of the massive scale of military spending worldwide, even in times of economic downturn, included the production of a Pax Christi youtube video for the first time (see also item 6 below). A Catholic school in Leamington Spa sent teachers and pupils to the Ash Wednesday annual service of repentance at the Ministry Defence this year, deploring the planning for nuclear war in that building. It was hoped that other schools will follow the example of Trinity Catholic School in the future and join Pax Christi, engaging with its peace education outreach.

Bruce Kent, who has just finished a ‘Scrap Trident’ tour of Britain, urged everyone to bring concern about nuclear weapons to the attention of political and religious leaders. “This is a passionately urgent issue in our world today” he said. The Secretary General of Brussels-based Pax Christi International, José Henríquez from El Salvador, was present at both AGMs. He said afterwards that: “the focus on values and the commitment to acting together is very powerful in terms of living the Gospel”.

2. Bishops issue scripture study guide

A new resource has been launched by the Bishops' Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis to promote a deeper appreciation of the place of the Bible in the Catholic community in England and Wales, and to support the new evangelisation. *'The Word of the Lord: Discovering Verbum Domini'* has been written to help people study the Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, which followed the 2008 Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.

Bishop Kieran Conry, Chair of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis writes in the foreword to the Guide: "This Study Guide will help promote a deeper appreciation of the place of the Bible in our faith, and assist us in the new evangelisation which is being taken up with such enthusiasm. As we celebrate the Year of Faith marking fifty years since the Second Vatican Council, the teaching of Pope Benedict in *Verbum Domini* will increase our confidence in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, God's word to the world of today."

The Guide divides the teaching into six parts and contains easily accessible material for use in parish groups. It is hoped that it will particularly assist parish groups, catechists and teachers, to appreciate the richness of the teaching offered by Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, in *Verbum Domini*. The Guide is published by the Catholic Truth Society in London and can be obtained from: <http://www.ctsbooks.org/word-of-the-lord-2>

3. Oscar Romero

Supporters of the Cause of Archbishop Oscar Romero have welcomed the news that the process to beatify and eventually canonize him, has been 'unblocked'.

Julian Filochowski, former director of CAFOD, who met Archbishop Romero many times, said: "It is wonderful to learn that the Cause for Archbishop Romero's beatification has been 'unblocked' by Pope Francis. This is a carefully chosen word and it means that the Cause will leave the siding where it has been parked for more than a decade, whilst accusations that Archbishop Romero's homilies went beyond the bounds of orthodoxy were examined by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It will now be put back on the regular road to sainthood under the auspices of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints - and in all probability it will be fast-tracked since the beatification of a martyr does not require a miracle.

"Archbishop Romero is already a hugely popular icon of holiness across the Catholic Church worldwide and within the Anglican Communion; but he is perhaps especially important to Pope Francis who in his words and symbolic actions has seemed so clearly to emulate Romero's lifestyle simplicity and his closeness to the poor. Maybe 2014 will be Romero's year - as Archbishop Paglia seems to anticipate; we can certainly now hope, and indeed expect, to celebrate the centenary of Archbishop Romero's birth in 2017 with his sanctity formally recognised by the Church." For more information on the Oscar Romero Trust, see: <http://www.romerotrust.org.uk/>

4. Living wage

Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), the social action arm of the Catholic Church in England and Wales has renewed its call for fair wages that cover families' basic needs. This follows the Government's April announcement, in the wake of the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission, that the national minimum wage is to rise by 12p an hour to £6.31 for adults and by 5p to £5.03 for 18-to-20-year-olds from October this year. This increase remains below the rate of inflation and is still behind the Living Wage.

CSAN comprises 41 member charities which work with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in the UK including refugees, prisoners, the elderly, disabled people and homeless people, as well as thousands of children and families living in poverty.

5. Benefit Changes

Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) has announced that it will be monitoring the effect of benefit changes to ensure that vulnerable families are protected. CSAN has consistently voiced its concern about many of the benefits changes that took effect last month (April 2013) including the introduction of the Under Occupation Penalty and the Household Benefit Cap, abolition of the Discretionary Social Fund and localisation of Council Tax Support.

Focusing on 10 key indicators, the Benefit changes & cuts impact survey will chart the proportion of Catholic Charities' service users who are struggling with debt, in housing need, struggling to meet food costs, foregoing basic utilities, unemployed or underemployed, suffering from mental health difficulties, experiencing family

breakdown, experiencing social isolation, unable to access other services and/ or experiencing digital exclusion over the next year. Announcing the project, CSAN's Chief Executive, Helen O'Brien said: "We are committed to ensuring that vulnerable people are not marginalised by these changes."

Alison Gelder, Director of Housing Justice said: "The localisation of benefits is changing the way welfare is provided in our communities. Volunteer-led services like Night Shelters which are delivered by churches are already plugging gaps in the social safety net as Local Authority services are reduced because of cuts. We plan to use our network to ensure a national safety net continues and so we need to collect and share information as never before. Homeless people are depending on us and we don't want to let them down."

Cathy Corcoran, Director of the Cardinal Hume Centre said: "This survey will be vital in tracking the impact of the benefit changes across the services that we provide. We have already noticed that demand for our centre's employment, housing advice and benefits advice has increased substantially since the beginning of April. We are anxious to ensure that our fears that these changes will cause the individuals to forego basic living needs and experience greater social isolation are averted. With the increasing squeeze on welfare, families are coming to us and other Catholic charities because they have nowhere else left to turn."

6. Military spending

The UK spends £39 billion a year on the military and arms, while vital services in health, education, welfare and renewable energy are cut or under threat. This was the concern raised at a meeting in the Houses of Parliament on Monday 15 April, when Pax Christi joined 38 other peace and development groups to challenge military spending in the UK and globally. Bruce Kent, vice-president of Pax Christi and founder of the Movement for the Abolition of War, chaired the meeting of around 80 people where speakers called for an immediate shift in government policy and spending priorities, away from military spending and towards public services and sustainable energy.

The meeting started with the viewing of a new short film from Pax Christi *'What would you do with \$1.7 trillion?'* In the film, CAFOD Director Chris Bain suggested that this military expenditure could be used to help poor countries adapt to climate change and to help develop a green economy with less reliance on fossil fuels. Justice and Peace activist Dr Jim Sikorski, from South London, suggested the money saved could be spent on improving mental health services and on keeping small local hospitals open, rather than closing down local services.

Speaking at the meeting, Kate Hudson, Chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, highlighted the 'Scrap Trident' campaign and increasing opposition to spending around £100 billion on renewing Britain's nuclear weapons system. "Trident is an old Cold War system" she said; "Britain needs a new culture of peace where it plays a new role in the world." Anne-Marie O'Reilly of Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) said that, "while our public services face drastic cuts, the government cannot continue to spend more than almost every other country in the world on weapons and war." She pointed out that, "the UK's military spending each year is enough to stop the cuts to the NHS twice over." She called for an end to the annual £700 million government subsidy of arms exports.

John Hilary of War on Want criticised Prime Minister David Cameron for boasting recently that Britain has the fourth largest military budget in the world. "We are moving into a period of high technification of War" he said "where Britain is expanding its use of drones, and these have wrought high civilian casualties in Pakistan and Afghanistan." Green MP Caroline Lucas was critical of government ministers who support military expenditure because of job opportunities in a military-fuelled economy. She suggested that with imagination and commitment, alternative investment and jobs can be developed.

Concluding the meeting, Pat Gaffney of Pax Christi said, "we must bust the myth that violence and war works". Bruce Kent wanted a greater challenge to "the militarisation of education" and called on the big development agencies to publicly make links between poverty and military spending.

The **Global Day of Action on Military Spending** saw actions across the UK. Earlier in the day on Monday, Pax Christi joined campaigners holding a *"Play the budget right"* street theatre action outside Westminster to protest against the billions spent on the military and subsidising arms exports, while vital public services are cut back. Players seeking medical treatment, a school place or welfare services instead won military equipment, symbolising the transfer of public resources into military spending. For more information see: www.paxchristi.org.uk
See the video here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBGeBIsiSMU&feature=youtu.be>

7. Aid cuts

Aid and development agencies expressed their concern that the government once again has not kept its pledge to enshrine in law the principle that 0.7 per cent on national income should go on overseas aid. Instead some have expressed fears that some of the aid budget could be diverted to fund military peacekeeping missions.

CAFOD's director Chris Bain said: "The 0.7 per cent legislation is designed to insulate the commitment to aid from the pressures of day-to-day politics, so it is all the more disappointing that – that for the third time during the coalition government - it appears to have fallen victim to those pressures. Of course, what is of paramount importance is that the UK meets and maintains its historic commitment to give 0.7 per cent of national income on aid to the poorest communities in the world, and persuades other countries around the world to follow suit. And the UK government must be praised for hitting that target this year. But the legislation remains vital in order to cement that commitment for future generations, and we will therefore continue to push for it to be put into law as this session unfolds, and for the rest of this Parliament. In the whole of this debate, we must never forget the transformative role that well-targeted aid can play in people's lives, for example, giving people access to the basic needs of life like safe water and sanitation as well as shifting the balance of power within the broken food system so that small-scale farmers have a decent chance of making a living."

9. Rowan Williams takes on new social justice role as Chair of Christian Aid

Dr Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, became Chair of Christian Aid's Board of Trustees on May 1 with a plea to Christians to become agents of social justice. He stressed the importance "of Christians saying we live from a set of values, the Kingdom of God, that will challenge a great deal about the way the world runs." He added "while we're not in the business of violent revolution, or the expectation of overnight change we have to go on saying change is possible, we've seen it happen, we can make it happen and with the grace of God we go on with a commitment to making it happen. Christian Aid has a major role to play in this with its fight against the systems and structures that force people to live in poverty. It is essential that the organisation retains its radical agenda for bringing about change. We are in Christian Aid because we're not prepared to sit down quietly under a system that seems unjust, that seems radically to push people out of the way for the sake of profit."

10. IF Campaign Lobby of Parliament

More than 250 members of religious orders, priests and lay associates lobbied their members of parliament to push for action on global hunger on May 15 as part of the Enough Food for Everyone IF campaign. Organised by CAFOD - in conjunction with JPIC Religious Links, the Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network, Progressio and others - the lobby came ahead of June's G8 summit which is held in the UK only once every eight years. The participants, with their vast experience of living and working in developing countries, raised with politicians the reasons why one in eight people worldwide go hungry, and challenged them to respond. The key message was that there is enough food in the world to feed the global family if some systemic changes take place, such as more investment in smallholder agriculture, more transparency and accountability of big corporations, and measures to tackle tax dodging. Nutrition should be prioritised at the G8 hunger summit on 8 June, a day that coincides with an IF ecumenical service and mass rally in London.

For full report go to: <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=22554>

8. Human Rights Violations

The UK head of an international Catholic charity has attacked a government report on human rights violations, saying it "glosses over" the growing problem of persecution against Christians. Neville Kyrke-Smith, national director of Aid to the Church in Need (UK), said the Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2012 Report on Human Rights and Democracy published this week "downplays the scale of Christian persecution." Although he praised the FCO for considering religious freedom issues in its report, he criticised the coverage of intolerance towards Christians. He highlighted the exodus of Christians from the Middle East, especially Iraq, describing the report's references to this as "woefully inadequate."

Referring to research showing that 75% of all religious hatred in the world is directed against Christians, Mr Kyrke-Smith said: "The FCO must not gloss over the problems faced [by Christians] in these countries, leaving serious cases of religious hatred unacknowledged and unmentioned." Research shows that 200 million Christians face discrimination or persecution and other reports that at least 100,000 are killed for their faith every year.

He expressed particular concern that the problems faced by Christian women in many countries were given little or no coverage. While the FCO report mentions the problem of Coptic Christians girls being abducted and forced to convert in Egypt, he said: "there seems to be no realisation of the scale of the abductions." He referred to evidence given at the US Helsinki Commission in 2011, which stated that up to 800 Coptic Christian women have been kidnapped since 2009. Similarly Mr Kyrke-Smith expressed concern that there was no mention of the problems of sexual harassment or rape facing Christian women in Pakistan.

He said: "While welcoming the FCO's commitment to 'constructive long-term engagement' and 'detailed expert discussions on the role of faith groups in civil society' in China – these are no substitute for directly addressing the range of problems faced by Christians." Full statement http://www.acnuk.org/data/files/NKS_FCO_statement.pdf

10. Bangladesh Safety Accord

Global retailers have signed the Bangladesh Safety Accord after massive public pressure following the wholly preventable building collapse which killed over 1,000 people. The Safety Accord is a landmark agreement, bringing together brands, supplier factories, trade unions and NGOs to end appalling unsafe factory conditions. The heart of the agreement is the commitment by companies to pay for the renovations and repairs necessary to make factory building in Bangladesh safe. Signatories include H&M, Zara, C&A, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, Primark, Mango, Aldi, New Look, Mothercare, Sainsbury's, Benetton, Next, Lidl, Abercrombie & Fitch and Bonmarché but pressure still needs to be put on Gap and Asda-Walmart to support this safety agreement.

The terrible scale of this tragedy has shone the spotlight on the garment industry. But every day, across the world, women are slaving away in appalling conditions to make our clothes: <http://waronwant.org/clothes>

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

MAY

20-25 Telford Homeless Action Week (THAW) will begin on **Monday 20 May** with a FIREWALK and end with Wrekin activities on **Saturday 25 May**. Details 01952 291904 or email: kaybennett@staytelford.co.uk

25+26 Card Signing - CAFOD Hunger for Change – all parishes LPA 10 (Ellesmere Port & Hooton)

JUNE

1 Fairtrade Stall - St Mary's Hooton

2 LPA 10 J&P Group Meeting Our Lady's Ellesmere Port 6.30pm

4 Hoole URC 7.30 pm Romy Tiongco. An opportunity to hear from Romy Tiongco, Mayor of Damulog in the Philippines, about happenings in the Damulog area over his two periods as Mayor, and how he contemplates future developments. Further information 0151 526 2799 or kalinaw@mucaard-uk.org

8 IF RALLY in London for G8 Summit. CAFOD supporters in Macclesfield are organising for a coach to pick people up in Wilmslow and then to go on to Macclesfield to pick up others before heading down to London. Some places on the coach still available - email shrewsbury@cafod.org.uk or call 01244 677594
Further details about the IF Campaign and the supporting organisations at <http://enoughfoodif.org>

8 Fairtrade Stall Our Lady's Ellesmere Port

23 Fairtrade Stall St Bernard's Ellesmere Port

28/29 Fairtrade Stall St Saviour's Ellesmere Port

STOP PRESS! Message from CAFOD Tropical Storm Mahasen is starting to hit southern Bangladesh. Heavy rain and winds of up to 100 km/h are expected, and people are bracing themselves for flash flooding and widespread damage to buildings and farmland. Our longstanding local partner Caritas Bangladesh has put more than 5,000 trained volunteers on standby, and ensured that stocks of emergency aid will be available if and when they are needed. Please keep all those who may be affected in your prayers.