

The 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](mailto:anneoc980@hotmail.com)

## VIEWPOINT: THE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL PROTEST

**Ann Farr** 14 March 2021

Social media posts are commenting on the roller coaster week that this has been for women. Starting with all the congratulations for International Women's Day, when we were able to share in some wonderful occasions recognising women for all that they do.

But it also seemed that big companies were getting on the bandwagon, even when we know them for their exploitation of their workforce, women included.

Mid-week the heart-breaking news of the finding of the body of Sarah Everard was released and a serving police officer was charged with her murder.

Last night we saw the horrific scenes at the Band Stand on Clapham Common. Today, we have Mothering Sunday.

A roller coaster indeed and one during which many thousands of women have come forward to tell their stories of abuse and violence and the daily fear which means that they are constantly listening and watching and cannot be who they really are and are not free to walk where they wish.

'She was walking home.'

Calls for vigils went out - for silent vigils with candles - remembering Sarah and all those women who have died through violence. A call for things to change, for women not to live in fear every day of their lives. A call to [#ReclaimTheseStreets](#)

Safely distanced vigils were planned, and took place peacefully in other parts of the country. In Birmingham, there was no police presence and no problem. Clapham Common Vigil was always going to be the most emotional and to have the most media attention.

No matter what we feel about the gathering that took place later on Clapham Common, we see that distressed and grieving women went, throughout the day, to respectfully lay flowers, light candles and to stand in silence to remember Sarah and all those other women, including themselves who have suffered violence and who live their lives in fear

There is an interesting thread of evidence about the legal case of the gathering. Whilst some media are reporting that it was illegal, this is by no means clear. What is clear is that the organisers made every attempt to have discussions with the police in the hope that the silent, safely distanced vigil they were organising, could take place. This was not to be and in the face of this we were asked to light candles at home.

### To Light Her Way Home

Many of us lit candles and stood on our doorsteps in quiet reflection and in memory of Sarah and all women who have

died in violence. On Iona the light shone out of the Oran Chapel as 118 candles were lit and the names of the women killed by men were read out. There will be so many that we have never heard of. 16 year -old Wenjing Lin was murdered by a man last week in Wales but it went almost unnoticed.

Many of us in Pax Christi have taken part in vigils, protests and demonstrations over the years. We are committed to protesting nonviolently against injustices that have gone unchanged through other means and we have witnessed many incidents of protestors being treated with violence but these have generally not appeared on the media.

Last night's violence by the police towards the women on Clapham Common, was filmed by the media and on phones and shown all over social media, all over the world. The reactions have been ones of shock, disgust, horror, grief and pain. The actions have been widely condemned. The feelings of the people can be seen and heard in the conversations between friends and the subsequent protests that took place today.

Against this background, there is widespread protest at the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill being taken through Parliament, at great speed, tomorrow. If passed, this will severely curtail our rights to protest. At 290+ pages long it proposes draconian measures and particularly targets groups of people, such as travellers. Even lone protestors don't escape. It means that any excuse can be used to curtail vigils or protests if the 'powers that be' don't want it to take place! We have been urging our members and friends to contact their MPs asking them to oppose this Bill.

The Human Rights Act 1998 sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that everyone in the UK is entitled to. Article 11 protects the right to protest by holding meetings and demonstrations with other people: "Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association with others." The passing of the above Bill would deny our fundamental right to peaceful protest.

In his prayer intentions for February, Pope Francis made a powerful and heartfelt plea for all violence against women to stop. He said abuses and violence against women are "acts of cowardice and a degradation of all humanity." "We must not look the other way. Let us pray for women who are victims of violence, that they may be protected by society and have their sufferings considered and heeded by all." "The testimonies of the victims who dare to break their silence are a cry for help that we cannot ignore." He urges people not to be indifferent and to pray for the protection of victims.

In *Fratelli Tutti* (225/6/7) Frances says, " In many parts of the world there is a need for paths of peace to heal open wounds. There is also a need for peacemakers, men and women prepared to work boldly and creatively to initiate processes of healing and renewed encounter." He goes on to speak of the importance of truth as inseparable from

justice and mercy and essential in building peace. He says that truth means telling families, torn apart by pain, what happened to their missing relatives and it means recognising the pain of women who are victims of violence and abuse. Every act of violence committed against a human being is a wound in humanities flesh; every violent death diminishes us as a people...

We are all diminished by the murder of Sarah Everard, by what happened yesterday on Clapham Common and by all the open wounds of violence that are festering in our communities, in our country. We are called to be peacemakers and this means we need to seek the truth, speak that truth to power, condemn violence and work boldly and creatively, as well as courageously, to help bring about justice and healing.

[www.ncronline.org/news/francis-chronicles/pope-violence-against-women-displays-cowardice-degrades-all-humanity](http://www.ncronline.org/news/francis-chronicles/pope-violence-against-women-displays-cowardice-degrades-all-humanity)  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/41755>

## NAMES OF WOMEN KILLED BY MALE VIOLENCE READ OUT IN PARLIAMENT

**Ellen Manning** 11 March 2021: During Thursday's House of Commons debate marking International Women's Day Labour MP Jess Phillips read out the names of women killed by men in the past 12 months. It took Phillips, who is shadow minister for domestic violence and safeguarding, four-and-a-half minutes to read out the 117 names of women killed in the UK where a man has been convicted or charged as the primary perpetrator. Phillips said: "Killed women are not vanishingly rare, killed women are common."

The MP for Birmingham Yardley carries out the ritual each year. This year's came a day after human remains were found in the search for missing Sarah Everard, who vanished while walking home from a friend's flat in south London on 3 March. A Metropolitan Police officer has been arrested on suspicion of murder.

After reading out the 117 names, Phillips addressed Everard's disappearance as she said: "We have all prayed that the name of Sarah Everard would not be on any list. Let's pray every day and work every day to make sure nobody's name ends up on this list again."

### A PLACE

I dream a place  
for women  
to come apart  
to meet themselves  
in a safe and nurturing space.

A place for women  
who have never been alone,  
or looked upon their deep feminine selves,  
can be free to sink  
into the wombs of  
their grandmothers,  
their mothers,  
themselves

I dream of a place  
where all the cycles of  
a woman's life  
will be acknowledged  
and celebrated  
in tune with nature and  
the rhythms of the earth

Our Pax Christi Daily Prayer includes the following:

Loving God,

Strengthen: my determination to work for a world of peace and justice; my courage to challenge the powerful with the values of the gospel and my commitment to find nonviolent ways of resolving conflict.

Teach me to speak out for the victims of injustice who have no voice and to reject the violence which runs through much of our world today.

Ann Farr is Chair of Pax Christi England and Wales  
14 March 2021

Earlier this week, Phillips warned that women's advancement in society had been "set back" by the coronavirus pandemic, and would likely lead to more domestic abuse in the future.

In an interview marking International Women's Day, she said: "I think the pandemic has set women back in lots and lots of different areas and the level of risk will no doubt have massively increased during the lockdown, as opposed to the actual pandemic itself. The lockdown will have massively increased people's risk register at the same time as decreasing their opportunities for escape. But not even escape – escape is too big a term – their opportunities to be in front of somebody else, whether that is someone in the shop or a teacher in their kids' class, or their social worker, their staff, their colleagues. We just have eliminated touch points that keep people safe and women's risk assessments at home are based on those touch points and when they are removed the risk will have skyrocketed."

<https://uk.news.yahoo.com/jess-phillips-reads-names-women-killed-men-153229683.html>

I would like a place  
where the weary,  
the battered and the raped  
will find healing  
in herbs and touch and dance

I dream a place  
where women will sing and chant  
beneath the full moon  
and dance around  
the dying embers,  
a place  
where the feminine will  
be nurtured  
and born again  
into our world

Ah, I dream a place  
for virgin, mother and crone  
to rise again  
in fullness  
with the moon.

**Edwina Gateley**

## TEXT: DR GEMMA SIMMONDS AT ST MARTIN IN THE FIELDS ROMERO SERVICE

15 March 2021: Dr Gemma Simmonds CJ, gave the following address at the National Ecumenical Service 'Let Us Dream - Unmasking a Post-Covid Future with St Oscar Romero, held at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church in London on Saturday 13 March. The service was led by Revd Richard Carter.

Back in 2019, in the alternative universe we lived in before Covid, I can remember sitting on a bus and looking at some of my fellow passengers. Their appearance and language suggested that they were not native British, and they were wearing masks. 'How very odd these foreigners are', I remember thinking to myself, 'whatever is it that they're so afraid of? You'd think we were all carrying some deadly disease...' Well, two years on, we all now know what kind of thing it was that they and we have become so afraid of. What seemed to me then a harmless, if somewhat neurotic foreign peculiarity has now become the norm for everyone as we struggle to save our own and each other's lives in the face of a deadly pandemic. The wearing of masks has become a banal, everyday nuisance, or a fashion statement, or an issue of ideological conflict, but it has also become a metaphor for the moral and philosophical questions raised by the pandemic itself.

A year ago, as the pandemic raged across Rome and the rest of the world, Pope Francis stood alone in the dark and the driving rain in St Peter's Square and blessed the world in the name of Christ. He looked a lonely and vulnerable figure as he raised the body of Christ like a battle standard, yet there was strength hidden within his apparent weakness and a wisdom beyond the philosophies of this world as he spoke of his dream for a better future. His recent book, *Let Us Dream*, asks:

'Look at us now: we put on face masks to protect ourselves and others from a virus we can't see. But what about all those other unseen viruses we need to protect ourselves from? How will we deal with the hidden pandemics of this world, the pandemics of hunger and violence and climate change?... If we are to come out of this crisis less selfish than we went in, we have to let ourselves be touched by others' pain.'

These words could just as easily have been preached in one of the famous homilies of St Oscar Romero, a man of virtue who, in his early days, liked to play it safe. He lived in circumstances of desperate threat and danger in the chaos of El Salvador. His clerical status and his conservative approach to unrest within church and society protected him from the worst of what was being suffered by the poor who surrounded him. He was certainly aware of their plight, he suffered an anguish of sympathy in the face of their suffering, but it was at a relatively safe distance. And then everything changed. The suffering came close to him through the death of a friend and brother priest, Rutilio Grande. Five other priests were murdered within the following two years, along with hundreds of lay catechists and ordinary Christians. Through Grande's example, Romero did what has become so mortally dangerous in our present crisis. In the words of Pope Francis, he 'touched the suffering flesh of Christ in others'. It was that close encounter with others' suffering that cured him of what Pope Francis describes as 'existential myopia', our inability to see what is in front of our eyes.

Pope Francis' comment about unmasking and the example of Oscar Romero's life and preaching pose a considerable challenge. Most of us spend a great deal of effort precisely trying to avoid being touched by pain, whether our own or that of others. Isn't it a reasonable form of self-preservation to do so? Suffering weakens us, it renders us vulnerable, it exposes us to danger. Of late, not only we as individuals but our entire society has become acutely alert to this in the calamity of Covid. Yet we are reminded by Pope Francis that a calamity offers opportunity as well as threat. In our current situation danger lies on all sides, but Francis quotes Friedrich Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, whose lines have been significant for him at different points in his life, 'Where the danger is also grows the saving power', and later he sets the whole world a challenge, 'We must not let the current clarifying moment pass us by'.

The current clarifying moment. Well, that's one way of describing it... But how clarifying is it, exactly? Early on in the pandemic a friend sent me a picture of the globe wearing a Covid mask. The logo read, 'don't let's pray to go back to normal: normal was the problem in the first place'. The theme of unmasking is both implicitly and explicitly common to both these great prophets and pastors of Amerindia and it takes up the central message of today's reading, 'For nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be known and brought to light. So, take care how you hear; for anyone who has will be given more; from anyone who has not, even what they think they have will be taken away.' (Luke 8:17-18)

But what will be given to us, and what is it that we stand to lose? Amid all the masks that we now wear for fear of contagion, Francis claims that 'Covid has unmasked the other pandemic, the virus of indifference, which is the result of constantly looking away, telling ourselves that because there is no immediate or magic solution, it is better not to feel anything [...] This crisis unmasks our vulnerability, exposes the false securities on which we had based our lives.' We are rightly shocked and grieved by the tens of millions who have suffered from Covid and the millions who have died, but he reminds us that in the 1st 4 months of 2020 3.7 million people died of hunger. That is more than all the people who have died of Covid so far.

Danger shakes us when it comes to our front door but passes us by when poverty, suffering and exclusion become banal and unremarkable. If we have managed to avoid the relentlessness of suffering hidden but deeply embedded within our social and economic systems, then we also avoid the God who cries out for our attention in the cry of the poor. It was precisely when Romero stepped out of the protective clerical circle in which he lived and allowed his vulnerable and unprotected self to be exposed to the gaze, the touch and the lives of the poor that he became a true member of the revolution of tenderness preached by Pope Francis.

The relative privilege in which we live as dwellers in the so-called developed world shields us from the most distressing aspects of poverty. But this also prevents us seeing the light of Christ shining from the lives of those who are excluded from and on the margins of society. St Paul reminds us that 'The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers' (2 Cor.4:5), but the minds of believers can be similarly blinded. We need to learn again to see, and Romero believed that for this reason the world needs the church. But a blind church is of no use to a blind world. The church, too, needs to learn to see again.

It is common currency to refer to Romero as a prophet, but that is a word too easily used with little reflection. One of Romero's biographers remarks that 'prophets are not simply pious social critics; they are also dreamers who dare to imagine a world where God is King, and for this reason they are persecuted.' Part of the prophet's role is to throw light on the meaning of what is happening all around us. When the University of Leuven awarded Romero an honorary doctorate in 1980 he made a speech in which he adapted the famous saying of St Irenaeus, 'the early Christians', he said, 'used to say, Gloria Dei, vivens homo - the glory of God is the living human being. We can make this concrete by saying, Gloria dei, vivens pauper - the glory of God is the living poor'. In his masterwork on Romero's theological vision Edgardo Colon-Emeric remarks that in his transformation of Irenaeus' words, Romero was offering an example of ressourcement from the margins. The ressourcement theologians of the Second Vatican Council led the church on a journey of renewal by returning to the sources of patristic wisdom. Romero leads us by a return to the sources of wisdom found in the Gospels themselves, the words and acts of Jesus who preached the good news of God's reign to the poor and those on every kind of margin.

When a bomb blew up the radio station Voz Panamericana, technicians worked for a week to repair it so that Romero's Sunday homily could be heard. He preached at the risk of his life and spoke of Christ not only by preaching sermons but being himself a sermon. He spoke of Christ being the best microphone of God and his hearers, as the church, being the best microphone of Christ. 'Each one of you', he said, 'wherever you are, needs to live the life of faith fiercely because you are a true microphone of God our Lord in your context. Thus the church will always have preaching'. Romero's sermons had an outreach of which few preachers can dream. It's estimated that 73% of the rural population and 47% of the urban population heard his sermons. When a further bomb destroyed the radio station again many came to the Basilica the following Sunday carrying tape recorders so that they could rebroadcast Romero's sermon. Those who were politically and socially as good as dead found a voice through that of their pastor. The crucified Christ speaks through his crucified people both to the world at large and to the church through and to whom he speaks. Romero was accused by his enemies of preaching violence, but he claimed that the only violence he preached was that of love; 'the violence that left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that one does to oneself to overcome one's selfishness so that there may not be such cruel inequalities among us... 'The violation of human rights', he went on, 'the marginalisation and destruction of God's image bearers, constitutes a denial of the incarnation that must be repudiated'.

Romero discovered for himself that the faces of the poor unmask the paternalism implicit in many of the church's ministries. Charity from a safe distance is not enough. What we need to be praying for this Lent and every Lent is conversion as he was converted. Many of his biographers speak of Romero's conversion from religion at a safe distance to a radical discipleship. It is not that he was previously in different to the plight of the poor, but he saw it as something effectively separate from himself. Michael Lee, one of the most eloquent commentators on Romero's life and legacy, tells us that for him conversion was both a turning from and a seeing anew. Romero himself described as a 'coming home' his growing commitment to immerse himself in the reality of the poor and his participation in efforts to make the world more resemble the reign of God and God's will for human flourishing. This conversion was not so much a radical change as an evolutionary process.

Covid has unmasked for all the world to see the blight of poverty, sexism, racism, slavery and forced migration that have lain hidden from our gaze in plain sight. Romero's evolutionary conversion calls to us more powerfully than ever to a new vision and an ongoing call to deepen our faith in a fundamental option which involves our life in its entirety and lasts until our dying day. Like the blind man in Mark's gospel, we have already been touched by Jesus, but we don't recognise what we see. Our prayer must be to be touched again so that we can see reality more clearly and respond to it wholeheartedly. Such a touch will above all breach the dualistic separation between the spiritual and the temporal which continues to exist in the hinterland of most of our minds, despite our denials. With the eyes of our faith renewed we will no longer be able to spiritualize our faith in a way that escapes or ignores the pressing issues of our day. We will move beyond personal acts of charity to an inescapable realisation of how sin is active structurally in our world and to full participation in the changing of the structures.

In one of his homilies Romero prayed for the conversion 'of those who do not collaborate in the construction of a more just temporal order', who 'are able to transform society because they have power in their hands'. We all have power as people with voices and choices, as consumers, as voters. Every Christian is called by nature of their baptism into Christ to be prophet, priest and king. This is our prophetic voice, it is the meaning of our participation in the priesthood of all the baptised and the establishment of the reign of God. I quote again Romero's homily, 'let me remind you what the church teaches: that the social structures, the institutionalised sin in which we live, have to be changed. All of this has to change... The names of the victims change, but the cause is the same. We live in a situation of inequality, of injustice, of sin; and using the force of arms, paying to kill the voice that speaks out, is no solution... What will work is if each person in their own position - from the government, capital, labourers, landowners - strives to change things: more justice, more love'.

In a conversation with a Jesuit friend Romero remembered the poverty of his roots but also the way in which joining the clerical caste removed him from those routes to a safe and comfortable distance. It was when he was made a bishop that he was confronted once again with extreme poverty and, in his own words, came back home. He said, 'You know,

Father, when a piece of charcoal has already been lit once, you don't have to blow on it much to get it to flame up again'. We can easily rest in the self-satisfaction of believing that our individual acts of personal asceticism and charity are enough. They are not. True conversion happens at the intellectual, the moral and the affective levels of our lives. Once the world has been unmasked, once our eyes have been opened, we can never see the world in the same way again.

Pope Francis believes that our current crisis may reveal or unmask the God who has been hidden to so many by the false securities of the political and economic systems which have flourished to the advantage of the tiny minority and the massive disadvantage of the majority and by the superficiality and individualism of contemporary culture. 'Walking together', he says, 'listening to what the Spirit has to say to the Church, means allowing for the apparent purity of our positions to be unmasked, and to detect the tares growing among the wheat'. A sacrament is a sign which makes real what it signifies. If the church is to be a 'sacrament of salvation' then its mission is to be the living

presence of Christ in the world, enabling all within and beyond it to taste in a partial way the fruits of salvation in justice, peace and radical love. 'The tradition that Christ entrusted to his church', Romero taught, 'is not a museum of souvenirs to be protected [...] It has always a view to the future [...] Here and now, we are still the authentic body of Christ in history [...] While Paradise will never be found here on earth, yet I want this earth to reflect the paradise toward which we journey. This is the reign of God that must be established on earth, A reign that many people do not want and yet a reign that is most necessary. Even if one must die as a martyr, this reign must be preached and announced.' You and I may not be called upon to die as martyrs, but we are most certainly called upon to live as martyrs, that is, as witnesses to the call of Christ in the poor and the marginalised to this daily, evolutionary conversion. If we can commit to this, then we will at last know what it truly means to be Christian. The name Romero means 'pilgrim'. If we need a companion to help us on our way, then, in the Saint of El Salvador, we could not find a better one.

St Óscar Romero, pray for us.

Watch the service on Youtube [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMFNWChI7NY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMFNWChI7NY)  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/41765>

## PAX CHRISTI CELEBRATES WOMEN 'S NONVIOLENT PEACEMAKING ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Pat Gaffney 9 March 2021

Once again, the power of Zoom worked its magic for Pax Christi members and supporters last evening. More than 140 people tuned in from every part of these islands as well as from Colombia, Uruguay, USA, Kenya, Palestine and New Zealand. The purpose of the evening was to explore nonviolence and the role of advocacy and nonviolence and religious life through the work of two women and to celebrate the many approaches to peace that women bring to our world.

Mary Yelenick leads the Pax Christi NGO team at the United Nations in New York. She is also active in the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and is a board member of Pax Christi International. She began her presentation by reminding listeners that Pax Christi's work over the past 75 years, and its work at the UN, has been to offer alternatives to violence. The issue focus at the UN is on nuclear abolition, the mining and extractive industries and Israel & Palestine.

As regards to advocacy as a process her reflection was revealing of her personal approach. It is, she said, about using one's voice and also using one's ears. Listening is essential to understand the issues and the people who have no connections or leverage. It is about building mutual trust, even to the point of discarding one's own views. It is about identifying problems, picking up early warnings and then working together to explore and solutions. Women, she suggested, are good at being in relationships therefore good at effective advocacy work. She summarised the work of advocacy as Listen, Learn, Share, Work Together.

Sr Katrina Alton is a Sister of St Joseph of Peace based in Nottingham. She is currently preparing to open a 'House of Hospitality' for women made destitute by the UK asylum process. She is a spiritual accompanier and as a peace activist her focus is on the arms trade and nuclear weapons. She opened her presentation with an image of the Resurrection by the artist Michael Cook revealing three women, full of colour, joy and life beside the disciples cowering in the dark. This, she suggested, shows that the women have witnessed great violence but have broken through... the Good News, that violence will not have the last word, has broken through.

To the three well-known evangelical virtues of religious life, poverty, celibacy and obedience, she added nonviolence - needed to make the world a better place. She illustrated how women religious today project this virtue. The Benedictine Abbess in Germany shelters refugee and migrant women who have been abused. The sister in Myanmar who stood in front of troops to prevent them firing on civilians. Her own action, with others, to block vehicles carrying weapons from entering an arms fair. The risk of losing one's own privilege, she said, especially as a religious, is one way of taking back power from violence through collaboration and change. She left listeners with this question: What holds us back from this evangelical work of nonviolence?

Participants were able to reflect together on what they had heard before being led in prayer by Martha Innes Romero, Pax Christi Coordinator in Latin America and Sister Monica O'Brien, a Marist sister and volunteer with Pax Christi.

Explore more of Pax Christi's nonviolence work here: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/resources/nonviolence-in-action/>  
For those who couldn't join our International Women's Day event on 8 March, here is the recording! Be sure to share around!  
[https://youtu.be/3FZhT\\_YTQU4](https://youtu.be/3FZhT_YTQU4)  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/41715>

## AN ECOLOGICAL REFLECTION FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Sue Martin:** Each year, International Women's Day is an opportunity to reflect on my place in the world. Respecting that I live on Darug land where ancestors cared for our common home for thousands of years, what is my place? Well, I am a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, niece, cousin, friend, colleague, peer, chair, mentor, educator, landcarer, netballer, pilgrim and Catholic woman.

My life journey has had a river running through it which formed a passion to better care for country. I have an agricultural science degree majoring as an agronomist, but my place was quickly grounded within the environmental education profession, helping others to better care for country.

I believe that our post-COVID, post-Anthropocene world needs leadership to build the deep connections across and within all our places. I see this reflected so beautifully in *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, finding our voice to build integral ecology with our common home. David Sobel, who is an American educator and academic responsible for developing the philosophy of place-based education, says, "you need to love your place before you can go out and care for it". The Aunties from our Australian First Nations community often say, "if you don't care for country, country will not care for you". Finding God in all things has become my way of proceeding.

Connecting with Fr Pedro Walpole SJ and the work being done by the Society through Ecojesuit, the 2010 document *Healing a Broken World* transformed my professional life. I had a place to assist with the Society's work to 'green' the heart of our world. I take heart from our Australian Jesuit community. The Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) are

alive. Our Reconciliation with Creation mission to develop environmental justice hubs in various places is growing, first in Melbourne, and now in Western Sydney. Our Being with God in Nature ministry to connect with the creator spirit in nature is growing, and provides a chance for givers and receivers of the Spiritual Exercises to breathe new life into our place, all to help build a post-COVID post-Anthropocene world.

My life motto is 'strong woman' and my inspiration is Ruth from the Old Testament. She is my strong woman who cares very deeply "across and within her place", and is also a farmer! From the New Testament, I draw inspiration from Martha and Mary and their complex servant leadership, as I do the strength of our Mother Mary and her ability to ponder at the foot of the cross.

My life has been filled with strong women. Sr Anna Conway RSM, an Irish Mercy nun, blessed my parish journey. My parents formed my core and it is my mother, a deeply religious woman with theology qualifications, who continues to be an inspiration. I was also educated by the Good Samaritan nuns who instilled deeply a sense of caring for the other.

The Society itself was initially formed with strong women who walked with Ignatius, in patronage, advocacy, and active collaborative work, as described by James Reites SJ in 2013 article for *The Way*, '*Ignatius and Ministry with Women*'. If I am to fulfil my mission to 'green the heart of our world', I need to be all these strong women.

<https://jesuit.org.au/an-ecological-reflection-on-international-womens-day/>

## SPANISH COMBONI SISTER TO RECEIVE A 2021 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD

Sister Alicia Vacas Moro, a registered nurse, ran a medical clinic in Egypt for eight years, treating more than 150 low income patients a day. She then moved to the biblical town of Bethany to help an impoverished Bedouin community, especially women and children. She set up training programs for women that provided them with previously unavailable economic opportunities, and established kindergartens in Bedouin camps, providing an educational foundation for children.

In an environment shaped by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Sister Alicia also assisted traumatized refugees and asylum seekers, a job she continues to perform on a larger scale in her current role as the regional coordinator for the Comboni Sisters in the Middle East. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck northern Italy, she flew to Italy to assist and treat fellow sister nuns, undeterred by extreme danger to herself.

Ann Farr, Chair of Pax Christi England and Wales writes: "Pax Christi EW sends congratulations to our good friend Sr Alicia Vacas, Regional Coordinator Comboni Sisters Middle East, on receiving the Woman of Courage Award 2021. Pax Christi has a long association with the Comboni Sisters in London and in Palestine and Israel. Pat Gaffney and I first met her in Bethany when she had just returned from Gaza as a member of the Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)

delegation collecting evidence on the horrific onslaught there. What she told us then has stayed with me all these years later. Many of us were able to hear more on this in when Sr Alicia came to the UK in 2009, on a PHR tour to report on the impacts of those military attacks.

In subsequent years we have stayed with the Comboni Sisters in Bethany, been entertained by the children in their convent kindergarten and visited their kindergarten projects in the threatened Jahalin Bedouin villages in the desert outside Jerusalem. We were also able to see their work in Tel Aviv with the traumatised refugee women and children in the PHR Clinic and the Kuchinate Project. This reward is very well deserved and a great celebration on International Women's Day. We are pleased and proud to have this Woman of Peace and Courage as our friend."

The awards will be presented in a virtual ceremony hosted by US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken on Monday 8 March - International Women's Day.

The First Lady of the United States, Dr Jill Biden will deliver remarks to recognize the courageous accomplishments of these women.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/41701>

## WE CANNOT ALLOW THE PANDEMIC TO SET GENDER PARITY BACK DECADES

“8 March is International Women’s Day (IWD) and alongside the celebrations of women’s achievements and progress towards gender parity, we must not allow the pandemic to set us back decades,” says The Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s Senior Analyst, **Dr. Andrea Barry** in the following article:

This International Women’s Day is in the middle of a pandemic, which has exacerbated gender inequality issues in the UK but especially for women in poverty.,

### **Pre-pandemic inequities have widened during the pandemic, especially for single mothers**

Before the pandemic, women were more likely to be stuck on low pay, more likely to be working in lower-paid sectors and lower-paid roles in higher-paid sectors, and trapped in underemployment due to childcare and transport barriers. COVID-19 has made this worse, as those lower-paid roles are the least likely to be allowed to work from home. Pre COVID-19, 56% of mothers made a change to their employment due to childcare, with 3 in 10 mums reducing their hours. This is simply unacceptable that women are unable to stay in employment purely due to unpaid labour.

According to the UK Harmonised European Time Use Survey (TUC) (2015), before the pandemic women were doing more hours on average of unpaid work per week, especially in childcare, cooking, and housework. When asked about this during the pandemic, women highlighted that this has only worsened as they report a reduction in paid work and further inequities in unpaid labour. Also, women have reported being disproportionately turned down for furlough during the first lockdown. According to the TUC, an unacceptable 7 in 10 women who applied for furlough were turned down. Nine in 10 have experienced higher anxiety and stress levels. Single mothers, particularly, are at breaking point according to Gingerbread. Ninety percent of single parents are women, and they are bearing the brunt of the effect of the pandemic.

*“I believe that those who set all these laws don’t see how much difference a sum like £20 makes. To them, it’s only £20 but if you’re on Universal Credit (UC), you know exactly the figure you’re getting, you know exactly what figure your bills are, you know exactly where all your money is going. I’m a single mum and I depend on UC – it’s not because I want to be, it’s because I don’t have a choice. £20 seems like a small amount – when I was working I might not have thought about that £20 but now I’m on UC I really feel it.”*  
Female, London

Before the pandemic, one in three single parents were stuck in low pay, compared to 18% of mothers in couples. Single parents saw the largest impact on hours worked and pay as single parents saw a 26% decrease in their hours worked, compared to 21% for couple parents and couples without children. Couple parents experienced a negligible (0%) impact on their weekly pay, whereas single parents experienced a 3% decrease in their pay. One in three single parents in employment were furloughed during the first lockdown, and since most of the single parents are women, this suggests that the recovery will be increasingly important for these women as they were more likely to be furloughed, especially compared to couple parents (25%).

Finally, the impact on finances cannot be ignored, as single mothers were struggling before the pandemic and this has only continued with 18% of single parents expecting their future financial situation will be worse, and 13% are behind on their bills, compared to 14% and 8% for couple parents. However, women, with or without children, were more likely to report they were behind in their bills during and before the pandemic, highlighting the precarity amongst women before the storm. Also, women were more likely to report that their employer was making cuts and therefore they reported a reduction in their hours. Sadly, they were also more likely to report being made unemployed, whereas men were more likely to report being furloughed. This is simply unacceptable. In the past we have highlighted the precarious situation women can be in if they cannot access the labour market effectively. To truly solve UK poverty, it is essential that women can participate in the labour market in the same fashion as men. The outcomes for women who are unable to participate in the labour market are clear. A lifetime of lower earnings means women who are single pensioners have a higher poverty rate than men in the same situation. We cannot allow the pandemic to turn back the clock on gender equality.

*“As a carer, it was already very hard finding a job which would provide flexibility around caring responsibilities. COVID has made that so much worse, coupled with the additional threats to the person I care for’s health.”* Female, London

### **Young women and BAME women are hit particularly hard**

In this discussion, we must also acknowledge the intersection of gender and age, as young women are particularly hit hard, being 25% more likely to be furloughed and 87% more likely to lose their job. While this reflects the sectors they work in, with 4 in 10 young women having worked in retail or hospitality, it is still a stark reminder that all women have been impacted in different ways, and that again, the recovery must address these inequities. The unemployment rate for young women is 11.1%, compared to all women at 4.7%.

The impact of the pandemic on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic women has also been a harsh reality over the last year. Before the pandemic, BAME women were dealing with high pay inequities, compared to BAME men as well as white women. Men

earned a higher hourly median wage than women in all but three ethnic groups. But more troublingly, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women suffered from some of the lowest-pay rates of any ethnic group. The work and pay inequities that impact many BAME women have been exacerbated during the pandemic with stark results.

When polled, more than 4 in 10 BAME women said they would struggle to make ends meet over the next three months. In fact, according to the TUC, BAME women are twice as likely to be in low-paid work and occupations that expose them to a high risk of COVID-19 infections. Around one in eight BAME women are employed in insecure roles, compared with one in 16 white women and one in 18 white men. These positions are low paid, but also high risk. Workers in insecure work have a harder time accessing flexible working conditions that allow for childcare when nurseries are closed, in addition to a harder time self-isolating or shielding due to a lack of adequate sick pay. This is unacceptable and must be addressed. The stress it manifests can be seen in other aspects of their lives;

BAME women were more likely to report anxiety a result of having to go out to work during the coronavirus pandemic (65.1%), and also reported struggling to cope with all the different demands on their time (45.4%). BAME women were the most likely to report that they were struggling to balance paid work and caring for their children with all the competing demands, and to go to the shops or do other tasks. This pandemic has highlighted how people living in poverty or in precarious situations have been impacted badly. It is essential that we continue to learn how the pandemic affects women differently, and the about the intersection of ethnicity and gender. We cannot allow any woman to be held back during the recovery.

### **A true recovery for all is essential to stop the rising tide of poverty after the pandemic**

Thankfully at the beginning of the pandemic, the Government recognised that it was important to act before more people were pulled into poverty. By implementing the £20 uplift to Universal Credit, people on Universal Credit have been kept afloat during the pandemic. It also highlights how essential it is to keep the lifeline to families and women who have faced job and income loss. We must not whip away this important support in six months, at a time that will restrict them further and risk trapping them in poverty. A reduction of Universal Credit at this time would disproportionately impact single mothers, and we cannot allow these women to fall even deeper into poverty.

*“This is a bad choice for the Government to consider making. Everything they do seems to be on a temporary basis and we don’t live on a temporary basis. We live permanently. We need commitment and we need certainty. “There are a lot of single parents home-schooling their children and they don’t have broadband or devices. They aren’t in the position to purchase something that would therefore be a contract, and they aren’t guaranteed to have this uplift after six months. There are many more job losses still to come. And even when we have the vaccine delivered to everybody there’s still uncertainty about home-schooling, you know, it may be on and off for years to come so the uplift certainly needs to be permanent for once.”* Female, Northern Ireland

However, this is a temporary solution to alleviating poverty in the UK. In addition to making the lifeline permanent: We need a focus on creating new, good quality jobs across the country. We must tackle barriers holding people back from the jobs market such as issues with transport, unaffordable childcare and lack of flexible work. We cannot allow another International Women’s Day pass with more women gripped by poverty. It is urgent to act immediately, so that we can continue our previous progress towards gender equality.

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/we-cannot-allow-pandemic-set-gender-parity-back-decades>

## **REFLECTION IN A TIME OF COVID-19**

**Heather Kiernan** writes: What am I called to do right now in this world of Covid-19? This is what I need to learn, amid my distracted and often scattered life, amid the relentless pull of social media and relationships online and offline. I need to learn to pause, and pay attention to the natural world, to the details that astonish. Heather selected this poem:

### **MESSENGER**

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird —  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me  
keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,  
which is mostly standing still and learning to be  
astonished.

The phoebe, the delphinium.  
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,  
telling them all, over and over, how it is  
that we live forever.

**Mary Oliver**

## SR HELEN PREJEAN APPEALS TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO FULLY RESPECT THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN

Sr Helen writes: On this International Women's Day, I pray that my church will one day place women at the centre of dialogue and decision-making. The absence of women's voices from these spaces deprives the Church of so much practical wisdom. This needs to change. I wrote a letter to Pope Francis about this in 2016. It appeared as an appendix in my book, *River of Fire*. Read the full letter below:

A Letter to Pope Francis from Sr Helen Prejean, personally delivered to him on January 21, 2016

Dear Pope Francis,

As I pray, I feel the Holy Spirit stirring my heart to use the occasion of meeting you to share a deep concern I have for our Church. An ache and sorrow, actually. I rejoice as I watch your stalwart efforts to renew our Church, especially in the area of collegiality and empowerment of the laity. But over my many years of service within the Church (I'm just two years younger than you), I am saddened to encounter over and over a very deep wound at the heart of the Church, a wound which, I am convinced, infects and weakens every aspect of Church life. That wound, Holy Father, is the way the Church treats women. Except for a few token representatives, women's voices are not directly heard in plenary synods, commissions, and tribunals. This thwarts the dynamic effect we women could have on dialogue and decision-making in the fashioning of church policies and practices.

Women's absence in these arenas is a huge loss, depriving the Church of the practical wisdom women have from faith lived on the ground in daily life and from insights given from our pondering God's word in our hearts. Women's access into Church forums in which we can share these experiences could do much to help our Church become more supple (open to surprises of the Holy Spirit), less cerebral and abstract, less rule-bound and authoritarian. In short, more real. Not to mention less patriarchal and less clerical. How can we have a healthy Church that truly embodies the compassionate mind and heart of Christ if our males are deprived of a steady diet of give-and-take dialogue with women-as-equals (by "equal" I mean fully empowered by the Holy Spirit)? The truth is, Holy Father, in the Church as institution, the baptism of girls and women seems not to be seen as fully empowering us with God's Holy Spirit as is the baptism of boys and men. Thus, in institutional structures of the Church, women's way of "imaging" God is muted. Simply because we are women there are certain opportunities of service from which we are systematically excluded.

If I may use my own life experience as an example: My ministry to awaken citizens on the issue of the death penalty (actually, to evangelize them: Jesus and his teaching are at the heart of every talk I give) has brought me to speak to U.N. commissions, Congress, governors, citizens in civic groups, and religious bodies all over the United States and other countries. In Protestant churches I am allowed to preach, yet, in my own Church I am not permitted to preach a homily. In fact, because I am a woman (a member of the laity, actually), I am not even permitted to proclaim the Gospel at Mass. Present liturgical rules prohibit me or any woman from proclaiming the Gospel. My voice is muted in my own Church, whom I love and have served all

of my life. It is a wound, a pain, an ache that never goes away—not only for me, but for all women. No doubt it is one of the reasons why young women as well as older ones distance themselves from the Catholic Church. They know they will never be admitted to full participation. They feel discounted, disrespected. What a loss of vibrancy to the Body of Christ. This saddens me immensely.

Somehow, over the years, we in the Church have lost the kind of shared ministry Jesus had on the road with his disciples, both women and men, and that Paul shared with women as he established Christian churches far beyond the confines of Palestine. How can we once again recover that vibrancy?

I hope this doesn't weary your spirit. You have already quickened life in our Church in a way I haven't witnessed since Vatican II. I rejoice in your boldness and your joy. I love that you're getting us out of buildings and rigid rule-following and leading us out to the hurting ones on the margins of society and even into the suffering of Mother Earth herself. I thank God for sending you to us, and I pray for you every time I think of you, which is often.

I am in heart and training a religious educator, so I can't help but begin to imagine a three- to-five-year catechetical (educational) pathway whereby the entire Church might be enabled to learn and dialogue and grow together toward a fuller understanding and embodiment of every woman and man as full-fledged, participating members of the Body of Christ. A huge task. But with the fire of the Holy Spirit and with trust in each other, surely...surely God will accomplish in us more than we can dream or imagine. One thing I do know, Pope Francis...I TRUST YOU.

Love abounding in Christ,

Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ

<https://www.sisterhelen.org/wp-content/uploads/A%20Letter%20to%20Pope%20Francis.pdf>

## A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD UNION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

Dear Pope Francis,

### **First of all, a big thank you**

Thank you for having given yourself completely in these eight years. From the beginning, you have challenged us with pastoral conversion for the whole Church and you are the first to strive for it. The Second Vatican Council marked a historical event in the life of the Church and from your pontificate there will be a milestone in the intense and long process of implementation of the Council. For this, as we Argentines say, you have "put all the meat on the grill" ("give it all one's got").

Thank you for letting yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit, as the Saint of Assisi. You responded to "Francis: go and rebuild my Church" and offered orientation with *Evangelii gaudium*. You heard the cry of the poorest and of the planet, identifying them in a single crisis, to which you teach us to respond with *Laudato si'*. And you discerned that the key to facing the problems of our world, plunged in a third world war fought piecemeal, is a society of brothers and sisters, as pointed out in *Fratelli tutti* and to continue on the path of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, undertaken by your predecessors. Thank you for being the Francis of the 21st century and for your passion for families, especially those most in need, shown in *Amoris laetitia*.

Thank you for trying to purify and heal the open sores of the Church, the atrocities of modern abuses and slavery, the violations of the dignity of women and our detachment in living the Gospel daily. Thank you for moving beyond the criticism and the devil's whirlpool, guiding the boat of humanity in the midst of the storm caused by the Coronavirus. Thank you for showing us that it is essential to undertake processes to achieve change and that each change requires an educational process that involves everyone. Thank you especially for trying to give the Church the feminine face that identifies her by her tenderness, closeness and mercy.

### **Second, the desire to go one step further**

Dear Pope Francis, I remember that last year you personally recommended us to be brave like Mary Magdalene even when addressing the Pope. That is why I allow myself to tell you, with all respect, trust and affection, that as a woman I feel that something is owed to us. You fight against machismo and clericalism, but I think that not enough progress has been made in taking advantage of the wealth of women who make up a large part of the People of God. There is already a theology of women with multiple elaborations. The suitability of women has been proven in civil society, in the economy, health, education, in caring for the planet, the defence of human rights and many other fields, of course, in addition to in the family and catechesis.

This message does not want to be a claim. It is not a question of occupying positions to be "like flower vases", just an ornament, because it is fashionable to appoint women, nor is it about reaching posts to "climb" to positions of power. No. It is about serving the Church with the gifts that the Creator Father has given us: a peculiar intelligence and sensitivity, an affectivity and particular capacity for the gestation and formation of people and a special aptitude for the generation of relational goods. May the wish expressed by you for women to join decision-making teams together with men cease to be considered a utopia and become something common in the Church.

### **Third, sharing a dream**

Can I share a dream of mine with you? I dream of a Church that has suitable women as judges in all the courts in which matrimonial cases are processed, in the formation teams of each seminary and for exercising ministries such as listening, spiritual direction, pastoral health care, care for the planet, defence of human rights, etc., for which, by our nature, women are equally or sometimes better prepared than men. Not only consecrated women, but how many lay women in all regions of the globe are ready to serve!

And I dream that, during your pontificate, you will inaugurate, together with the Synods of Bishops, a different synod: the synod of the People of God, with proportional representation of the clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay men and women. We will no longer be happy just because a woman votes for the first time but because many prepared lay women, in communion with all the other members of such synod, will have given their contribution and their vote that will add to the conclusions that will be placed in your hands. Probably, Holy Father, you already have this "card in your deck" to put synodality into practice and wait for the right moment to play it.

I assure you, dear Pope Francis, together with the communities to which I belong, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) and the Association of Consecrated Virgins *Servidoras* – founded in your diocese of origin, Buenos Aires, by Father Luis María Etcheverry Boneo, Servant of God – our prayer, entrusting you to Mary. Sorry for not having followed your footsteps in many respects. I commit myself, together with millions of Catholic women, to reflect more deeply on your teachings and to put them into practice.

I confess you that every morning, when I wake up, I ask myself: what is the Pope going to surprise us with today? Thank you for opening so many paths for the Church. And I thank the divine Providence for this and much more that we have received through you, during these first eight years of pontificate.

María Lía Zervino, *Servidora* (a daughter of the Church) 12 March 2021

[https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/03/12/open-letter-pope-francis-anniversary-catholic-women-240218?pnspid=hPY0s\\_UBHRCNB5xQBd6b7zJ70n66DN4Nmj9uADzJ&utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=8303](https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/03/12/open-letter-pope-francis-anniversary-catholic-women-240218?pnspid=hPY0s_UBHRCNB5xQBd6b7zJ70n66DN4Nmj9uADzJ&utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=8303)

## MARTHA HENNESSY – SUMMARY OF FIRST TEN WEEKS IN PRISON

Bill Ofenloch 11 March 2021

Martha Hennessy is currently serving her prison sentence at the Danbury Women's Federal Correctional Institution for her part in the King's Bay Plowshares. She is a member of the New York Catholic Worker and the granddaughter of its founder, Dorothy Day. Here is a summary Martha wrote of her first ten weeks in prison:

This week marks my tenth at the Danbury Federal Prison Camp for women in Western Connecticut, where I've been sentenced for my part in the King's Bay Plowshares disarmament action. A group of five, including my husband and two co-defendants dropped me off at the door on December 14th. I spent the next nine days in a small cell sleeping on a cot and having to call the corrections officers if I wanted to use the toilet which is outside the cell. A three-week quarantine is mandatory for all incoming prisoners, as well as outgoing.

Days nine to twenty-one were spent at the education centre where classrooms have been converted into cells for one to two people. Temporary shower stalls were put up in the bathrooms. All programs and routines are disrupted because of COVID.

Getting to the women's camp finally—a collection of ugly buildings on top of a beautiful hill—was a great relief. There are no locked doors, and we have total freedom to walk outside. Plus, a library and a chapel. The facility usually holds two hundred women, but these days the numbers are down to forty-five.

Three months ago, more than half the women contracted COVID. The Segregated Housing Unit was turned into quarantine space. The regular two bed cubicles now hold one inmate each. We all wear masks all the time (or are supposed to). Frequent hand washing and six feet social distancing are encouraged. "Main line"—the name of the line for dinner—has yellow-taped Xs where we are stand. We take our meals in Styrofoam clamshells back to our cubicles to eat alone. I often stand to eat with my food nesting at waist height on the metal locker in my cubicle.

Having the cubicle to oneself is a blessing. I am in a corner and the space is about eight feet by ten feet, with a bunk bed and two lockers, each two feet by two feet. Nothing is allowed on the walls or on top of the lockers, Belongings are stored inside. Pictures can be hung on the inside of the locker doors. Plastic bins and shoes are kept under the bunk. Beds must be made properly. Cubicles can be searched randomly. If belongings are not in the lockers, they will be thrown away.

Today we had breakfast at 8:50 a.m. Yesterday it was 6:50 a.m. Toast, milk, muffins and apples were served today. Sometimes there is cold cereal or hot oatmeal or a hard-boiled egg. Other meals rely heavily on rice, potatoes and pasta, with chicken, pork and beef sauces. Apples, oranges and bananas are available two to three times a week. The great shortage is vegetables. When they do come, they are over-cooked.

Our kitchen remains shut down but there is hope if might open soon and that the inmates might return to cooking.

Coffee, tea and juice powders are available through the commissary, as well as some good proteins like tuna, peanut butter, and refried beans. There are meals for vegetarians that include more beans and vegetables. The portions are adequate but the high carbohydrates, salt, and oil content, combined with what feels like forced bed rest, makes for an increase in people's weight and blood pressure.

One inmate came in with her medical history and a list of her medications. It was sent home on her arrival. My daughter described receiving my clothes in a box a week after I came here. She said she was grateful to know that I was still alive. The wellness centre for the staff is open for exercises. However, the women's gym, in a separate building by a quarter mile track, is not open at this time. Apparently, some of the weight lifting equipment is missing. We are always threatened with a "shakedown" when the place gets turned upside down in search of something as the inmates stand out to wait.

The TV remote disappeared as well and the consistent response is collective punishment. The door to the recreation room is locked until the remote turns up. It is difficult to find consistency in schedules, rules and daily procedures.

The noise level here is bearable, and space is reasonable.

Danbury FCI faced a lawsuit early in the pandemic due to the slow response in efforts to contain the spread. Inmates are being released to home confinement because of this lawsuit, along with efforts through the CARES act. The vaccine is being offered to higher risk inmates, and that will change the situation along with the early releases.

I expect to serve my time until May 16th, when I could be released due to my age, 65, when I will have served two thirds of my sentence. Many women here have five-to-ten-year sentences, most as a result of the "war on drugs" harsh guidelines. Most of them have young children whom they've left with grandparents, or if they are lucky, spouses.

The prison has a factory/warehouse run by Unicorp which is currently off line due to the pandemic. The wages are extremely low. Most earnings are spent on commissary. This system resembles the conditions of sharecroppers a century ago.

The physical plant is maintained with prison labour. Construction, landscape and electrical crews are sent out daily Constant repairs and maintenance are required, and federal contracts seem to encourage shoddy workmanship.

One of three shower rooms are functioning to serve the forty women here. It holds five stalls. We share four phones, using disinfectants between calls if we choose to.

On arrival, we are issued two sheets, two blankets, four underwear, five shirts and pants, and two pairs of socks. Small size toiletries can get you through the first weeks, but eventually you have to rely on commissary for all basic items, including stamps and envelopes. The quality of the textiles is very poor. Towels fray after a few months, work shoes fit poorly, and radios (which are needed to hear the TV) last only a few months.

But the women are wonderful and quickly share their items with one another, especially with new arrivals.

<https://kingsbayplowshares7.org/2021/03/martha-hennessy-summary-of-first-ten-weeks-in-prison/>

You can write Martha a letter at: Martha Hennessy #22560-021, FCI Danbury, Rt. 37, Danbury, CT 06811

*“People say, what is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do.” — Dorothy Day*

NJPN continues to have a weekly column in *The Universe*, and some of these are uploaded onto our website at [www.justice-and-peace.org.uk](http://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk)

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

The amount of water, electricity and plastics consumed by the prison is staggering. Doors and windows leak cold air. Two-foot icicles form on the eaves of the building. We seem to fill a dumpster nearly every day or every other day. Some inmates run all four showers simultaneously while using just one “to keep the water hot,” they say. At least a third of the food served is thrown into the trash.

All in all, this prison industry is a sketchy business from every perspective—socially, economically, ecologically and morally. It’s just another fossil fuel dependent enterprise that produces little benefit in the long run, and could be easily retooled to save money, energy and lives in a much more positive way. Reform is desperately needed, along with a big dose of common sense and a measure of basic humanity. But the same could be said for life on the outside too.