

Give Peace a Chance.

Nearly 200 people from the length and breadth of the diocese gathered at St Peter's School Solihull for the second Diocesan Justice and Peace Assembly Day on Saturday 7th October. The theme of the day was Peace- 'He came to bring the Good News of Peace', Eph 2:17. To help us focus on peace and reconciliation, we had two very experienced keynote speakers Gerry W Hughes SJ and Pat Gaffney , general secretary of Pax Christi UK.

The day started with a meditation based on the beautiful Pax Christi icon of 'Christi is our Reconciliation' made for Pax Christi International at the monastery of St John in the Desert near Jerusalem .It was given to Pax Christi to pay tribute to their many years of work for reconciliation in the Holy Land and the Middle East. The icon was displayed in the main hall and was a powerful visual focus for the Assembly. Archbishop Vincent spoke at the start of the day of the dangers of consumerism and the need of simple Christ centered living. He was presented with a box of Fairtrade goods to explore.

Gerry and Pat spoke out of their long experience in working for peace. Both highlighted the present challenge faced by this country in the debate about renewing the Trident nuclear deterrent at great cost or pursuing the road of nuclear disarmament. Peace is the right relationship with people, creation, God and ourselves. Christ brings about peace through vulnerability. We must let God into our thinking and feeling, Gerry said, warning us of the danger of a split spirituality.

Pat highlighted many of the challenges facing the world today as we seek to stop the cycle of violence unleashed by the war on terror post 9/11. She spoke of the work of Pax Christi in accompaniment and solidarity with those affected by violence. We are the one we are waiting for, she said stressing the work each of

us can do for peace. We all have a responsibility to speak and act in the cause of peace. Discussion followed on how peacemaking makes links between the religious world and the world of real life and how different models of peacemaking transform violence.

In the afternoon there was an opportunity to take part in various workshops exploring different aspects of peace and reconciliation from Unearth Justice, CAFOD's latest campaign which is challenging extractive industries to become more ethical , to supporting marginalized women caught up in prostitution, community regeneration to terminator technology and its impact on poor agricultural communities. A packed day ended with prayers before the icon once more.

The day gave us much to think about, new ideas and new challenges. It was also a chance to meet old friends and make new acquaintances among those actively involved in different ways in justice and peace in our parishes and communities throughout the diocese.

Fr. Gerry Murray
Chair of Commission
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