

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

Fresh from attending the CAFOD part of the Climate Change Day of Action in Coventry on March 19th I thought I would use my little space to urge you to get involved or step up your involvement in your parishes and groups in the latest CAFOD Campaign: "Our Climate is in Our Hands".

Our speakers from Kenya and Cambodia brought home very vividly how things have already begun to change. The world is facing many crises at present which have a global reach but the threat to our climate and future surely dwarfs them all. Time is slipping by.

The threat to the future of the planet is growing and already affects the poorest populations around the world. These most vulnerable people are our brothers and sisters. They are in the front line and need our help and support, and the support of the global community.

As our Bishops have told us: "Individual actions may seem insignificant but together the small steps of many people can have an astonishing impact".

Father Gerry Murray



Archbishop Vincent Nichols has agreed to be the keynote speaker at a 'Strangers into Citizens' seminar that will take place on **Saturday 4th April** between 10am and 1pm in the Grimshaw Room at St Chad's Cathedral, Queensway, Birmingham. The seminar will look at the challenges, from a theological, social, economic and political perspective, in seeking to address issues of social justice for migrants.

We have an ambitious target of 1,000 people to travel from Birmingham to London on **Monday 4th May** in what will be the largest ever rally in support of migrants in British history - that represents twenty 50-seater coaches.

A number of organisations and communities have already come forward to pledge their support and to organise turnout. Please contact Paul Bunyan, Birmingham 'Strangers into Citizens' campaign organiser, to pledge your support and help us reach our target. He can be contacted by phone on 07527 306016 or by E-mail: paul.bunyan@cumbria.ac.uk.

Please make a note of these two important dates to help plan and be a part of this historic event:

Saturday 4th April 10am to 1pm: 'Strangers into Citizens' seminar in the Grimshaw Room, St Chad's Cathedral, Queensway, Birmingham, B4 6EX.

Bank Holiday Monday 4th May from 12 noon: 'Strangers into Citizens' Rally - National Day of Action and Celebration at Trafalgar Square, London.

Let's turn STRANGERS INTO CITIZENS

Reflections on Justice and Peace in the Year of Saint Paul

by the Rt. Rev. David McGough, Diocesan Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham

The Year of Saint Paul has coincided with events that have shaken our world, events that cry out for justice, that long for a healing that only peace can bring. The ongoing tragedy of Gaza is but one example. Others are closer to home. The credit crisis and economic recession, improperly handled, have all the necessary ingredients to disadvantage those most in need. What we experience as a downturn in our standard of living will be experienced as death and starvation in other parts of the world.

It would be foolish to look to the writings of Saint Paul for a detailed commentary on the complex political and economic forces at work in our troubled world. He was neither a politician nor a broker of power! His witness offers a different understanding, an understanding of what it is to struggle with our broken humanity, a vision of what we can become in Christ.

It is for us, for every believer concerned with Justice and Peace, to draw strength from Paul's clear understanding of what we are in Christ.

The Conversion of Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus was not, properly understood, a private revelation that raised Paul above his day to day dealings with the rest of humanity. It was in fact the reverse. Paul, the zealous Pharisee, had been fully involved in his world. As a persecutor of the Church he had mistaken his own enthusiasm, however well intentioned, for the will of God. Such enthusiasm inevitably seeks to build a world in its own image and likeness. At best its efforts come to nothing. At worst such arrogance leads to oppression and persecution. Such, according to Paul's own testimony, was the consequence of his own attempts to build a better world for God. He became a persecutor of the church.

Paul's conversion experience revolved around his relationship to his fellow men and women. The Acts of the Apostles record that here was a voice from heaven. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Paul asked the question whose answer was to transform his understanding of himself and the world in which he lived. "Who are you Lord?" The answer that he received irrevocably identified Christ the Risen Lord with suffering humanity. "I am Jesus and you are persecuting me."

When we step back from this familiar passage we begin to understand that the pursuit of Justice and Peace is grounded for us, as it was for Paul, in the living Communion that unites the Risen Lord to suffering humanity. Christ did not exhort his disciples to feed the hungry and clothe the naked simply because they were in need. He did so because to reach out to our brother and sister is an act of communion with himself.

Such an understanding drove Paul's ministry. It is revealed in the greetings that are the beginning of every letter that he wrote. We would be mistaken in thinking that Paul first flattered his hearers in order to win them to the Gospel. Paul lived out the conviction that every person he met expressed Christ's living communion with a world on the way to salvation. It was for this reason, and for no other, that his greetings were an expression of reverence and warm engagement. In the presence of the community Paul was in the presence of his Risen Lord.

Although Paul's conversion was rooted in this deeply personal engagement with Christ the Risen Lord, it could be argued that his most creative thinking was in response to a broken world.

Again and again Paul faced the consequences of our petty divisions, divisions that expressed themselves in injustice and exclusion. The community of Corinth was deeply divided. Gross immorality preyed on the vulnerable. Courtrooms became the final resort of a litigious congregation. The rich dined at the expense of the poor. The Corinthian community became, at the time of Paul's letter, a microcosm of our divided world.

Paul's way forward was a restatement of his Damascus Road experience. There he had understood the power of Christ's resurrection as a call to communion in the world. From this experience was borne his understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ. We do not live as individuals. We are intimately linked to Christ as members of his Body. Our divisions are, quite literally, a desecration of the Body of Christ, a denial of the communion that we proclaim in the Eucharist.

I began with the observation that we could not properly expect Paul's writings to provide a detailed solution to the injustices of a complex society. He offers us something that is more than one proposal amongst many. He raises us above ourselves, brings us to understand that together we are the Body of Christ, that together we strive to become the perfection that is the fullness of Christ. This is a vision that will not grow tired and weary, that speaks to every generation.

Bishop David McGough

CAFOD LENT FAST DAY

Joe Andrew

As we move on into 2009 in Britain, as in the rest of the world, we face perhaps unprecedented difficulties. As President Obama said in his Inaugural Address, 'Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time.' At such times, though, it is also salutary to bring to mind both the far worse difficulties faced by our brothers and sisters in the developing world, but also how these problems may be overcome, with God's grace, and our help. The CAFOD Lent Fast Day on Friday 5 March enabled us to reflect on these issues.

Many of us still remember the appalling atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge - the rebel group that took over Cambodia in the 1970s - in the so-called 'killing fields'. During this time, 1.5 million people - a fifth of the population - lost their lives, and many lost their whole families. Take, for example, Phalla, the woman who appeared on the Fast Day leaflet: her entire family was executed and she was imprisoned and tortured. She survived her ordeal with one dream - to raise a family of her own. Today, Phalla has five children and fosters eight others who have been orphaned by AIDS. The care she provides has given her life meaning. Phalla says: 'I have learnt many hard lessons in my life and seen cruelty beyond words.'

But a positive aspect of this experience is my understanding of how people should be helped. Help starts from love. It's as simple as that.'

Phalla also works for Maryknoll, a charity which CAFOD has supported since 2003. Maryknoll offers food, shelter, medical treatment, education and training to people whose lives are affected by HIV and AIDS. Maryknoll gives Phalla an allowance to buy the things that her foster children need, such as food, clothes and school books. It is still a stretch for her to make ends meet, but the money eases the financial burden of looking after so many children. Phalla cares for those who are more vulnerable than she is and who have been denied the love and support of a family.

But, all people are part of the family of God and as such we have no larger claim to the earth's wealth and resources than anyone else. It is up to us to try and recognise the needs of our sisters and brothers around the world and to help them get their fair share so they can grow and flourish.

As always, CAFOD needs our help for its vital work. In the period following the Fast Day, we can all look out for the CAFOD materials in our parishes or schools; we can read more about Phalla and her foster son Leaph, and we can make a regular gift to support CAFOD's work month by month. 18-year-old Leaph said: "Three years ago I had nothing. Now I have a home, and education and hopes for the future. Thank you to CAFOD for helping people like me."

Joe Andrew

The Jesuit Fund for Social Justice

If your charitable work:

- Aims to relieve suffering or injustice;
- Could benefit from up to £2,000;
- Represents a Christian response to people's needs;
- Has links with the Society of Jesus;
- Is associated with the British Province..

You could apply for an FSJ Grant.

See: Website www.jesuitfsj.org

or EMail: secretary@jesuitfsj.org

Helping people who are disadvantaged can be costly; help may be available.

St. Francis House

A Catholic Worker Community in Oxford, St. Francis House was founded in 1993 by Clive Gillam & Mena Remedios to give hospitality to vulnerable people and to resist all forms of war and violence. The inspiration for the house comes from the Catholic Worker movement, co-founded in New York City in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Dorothy Day was a convert to Catholicism who wanted to find a way of combining her new found faith with her tireless commitment to justice.

If you want to learn more, or to offer financial support, please 'phone Sister Susan Clarkson on 01865-248288, see website www.catholicworker.org, or Email: srsusanclarkson@gmail.com

We hope to publish a full article in the next (Summer) Newsletter.

Diary Dates

June (continued)

15-21st

National Refugee Week

UK-wide arts, cultural & educational events celebrating the contribution of refugees to the UK. See: www.refugeeweek.org.uk

July

3-5th Fellowship of Reconciliation residential weekend for 18 to 30's. "Nonviolence: A (practical) tool for change", in London. Flyer attached.

12th Sea Sunday: Apostleship of the Sea

17-19th National Justice & Peace Network Annual Conference, Swanwick, Derbyshire. Leaflet & Application Form attached.

October

17th Fifth Annual J&P Assembly. Economics: "God or Mammon?" 10am-4.30pm. St Peter's School, Solihull, Birmingham. Speakers, discussion groups, workshops.

March

24th Anniversary of Archbishop Romero's assassination.

28th "Jobs, Justice & Climate" March & rally: "Put People First" Victoria Embankment, London. Assemble 11am. Many organisations. To sign the petition see website: www.putpeoplefirst.org.uk
NB. Ecumenical service from 10.30 at Westminster Hall, joining the March in Parliament Square.

April

2nd "The West Bank- After Gaza", talk by Ann Farr, Pax Christi. 7.30pm. Friends Meeting House, Coventry

4th "Strangers Into Citizens" Seminar, St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham Grimshaw Room, 10am-1pm. Archbishop Nichols keynote speaker. See the front page of this Newsletter.

10th Good Friday

12th Easter Day

25th Speak for CAFOD to Parishes and groups, training day in Walsall. Phone 01922 722944 to book a place.

25th Campaign Against Arms Trade Speaker training day & local contacts gathering, central Birmingham. Email: annemarie@caat.org.uk or see website: www.caat.org.uk to apply.

May

4th "Strangers Into Citizens" Rally and National Day of Action & Celebration. See the front page of this Newsletter.

7th Ali Ahmad, from CAFOD West Midlands office, speaking on Kenya visit. 7.30pm, Our Lady & St Hugh Catholic Church, Welch Way, Witney.

9th "Many Voices" multicultural sponsored sing, read & speak. St Philips Anglican Cathedral, Colmore Row, Birmingham. 11.30am. www.restore-uk.org

June

16th RESTORE Annual Meeting & 10th Birthday Party. Review of 2008 and Annual Report. More details soon.

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

The Birmingham Justice and Peace Newsletter is sent to everyone on our mailing list free of charge. If you would like to be added to the mailing list please send your address, including EMail details, to the Administrator.

Also, if you have an event you would like advertised in the Summer newsletter please send details to:

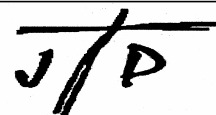
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More information about the Commission can be found on our website: www.birminghamjandp.org.uk

The views expressed in this newsletter are the views of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Birmingham Justice and Peace Commission or the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham.

**The Birmingham
Diocesan Justice and
Peace Commission
website.**



Birmingham Diocese

For information on the J&P calendar and links to J&P organisations....

For downloads from the J&P Resource Pack and much more...

www.birminghamjandp.org.uk