

Birmingham Justice and Peace Commission Newsletter

www.birminghamjandp.org.uk



Issue 9

Autumn/Winter 2008/9

Fourth Justice & Peace Assembly, 11th October 2008

"There are no strangers: I was a stranger....and you welcomed me". Matthew 25:35

Held in St. Peter's School, Solihull, it attracted 172 participants from 41 parishes (17 Deaneries) in the Archdiocese, notably including 23 students. Talks, discussions and workshops with an opening and closing liturgy, plus 14 exhibits by individuals and organisations involved in J&P, with an excellent buffet lunch, the programme was presented by members of the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission.

In his welcome, Fr. Gerry Murray, Commission chairman, pointed out that he was an economic migrant and that Birmingham was heavily dependent upon migrants. Bishop William Kenney, a member of the Commission, conveyed the Archbishop's greeting to the Assembly and drew our attention to biblical material showing that migration was not new, that Christ was a refugee and was, for a time, effectively lost in Jerusalem. He also noted that the Church was founded on immigrants; we were all brothers and sisters in this context. A summary of the Assembly appears on page 2:

An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought Michael Hornsby-Smith

Justice & Peace groups often find themselves struggling to get off the ground and can remain rather ineffective in raising awareness and bringing about change. Sometimes it's a matter of being unable to focus on specific issues, sometimes it's lack of group skills among strong-minded people, but mostly it's limited awareness of the wealth of material already available in the tradition of Catholic Social Thought. The fact is we've never had a coherent work that lays out in an accessible way Gospel inspiration, official teaching and social analysis on a full range of contemporary issues, together with parallel secular thought and finally action responses. The author has done us a great service in produced such an overview.

After a brief account of the injustices that challenge us in the social reality of our contemporary world, the book presents tools for the social analysis of the causes. The processes of globalisation and the dominant ideology of liberal capitalism need to be understood if their structures are to be regulated and the arbitrary exercise of power and increasing inequality prevented.

The second section of the book reviews the theological resources in order that Christians can make an action response. The chapter on *The Kingdom of God* draws extensively on Fuellenbach's work, reflecting on Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom and its meaning for Christians today. Next it is useful to hear about the contribution of political theologians and of secular writers; but particularly valuable is the reflection on *citizenship* characterised by participation, freedom, equality and solidarity, once seen as revolutionary but now recognised as based on kingdom values. The final chapter of this section outlines Catholic social thought, its key documents, concepts and development.

The most substantial part of the book is the consideration of six main areas in which Catholic social thought makes a valuable contribution: human rights, the family & bioethical issues, economic life, social exclusion, authentic development, and war & peace. This is where justice and peace people will find so much that is helpful, bringing together as it does an understanding of the issue in some detail, together with the developments in the Church's analysis and thinking over the years.

Finally the book deals with the last stage of the pastoral cycle: social action responses to the injustices that have been analysed and viewed in the light of theological reflection. Here we find some perceptive comments on the significance of Catholic NGO's and the effectiveness of a justice and peace network.

I strongly recommend this work : nothing else comes near it. At £17.99 (less from Amazon) for a volume of some 400 pages this is money well spent. Groups might share the cost ?

Brian Davies

JUSTICE and PEACE ASSEMBLY, 11th OCTOBER 2008, a summary:

Two keynote speakers gave contrasting and informative presentations:

Francis Davis, von Hugel Institute, Cambridge, discussed policy on immigrants, examples of the current situation in this country, church teaching and the requirements for future action which needed to be based on reliable data, pointing out key issues built around the imbalance of reality and perception in relation to migration:

- Policy makers' lack of understanding: people of faith are no longer in power. Ignorance is more dangerous than hostility. Evidence must support compassion/ justice, and counter gross misrepresentations in the tabloid press.
- The scandal of current treatment: poor pay, primitive accommodation, "hot-bedding", little support by the Treasury or Dept. of Work and Pensions.
- The challenge for the Church: matching care for immigrants & asylum seekers with action from parish level upwards. Recognising "the strange" is relevant to the Eucharist.

Shari Brown of RESTORE covered the nature, dimensions and practicalities of dealing with the current migrant situation in the city together with an account of the volunteer-based action in converting "strangers into citizens". She was herself an economic migrant, had worked with Churches Together in Birmingham (which founded RESTORE) and been much influenced by the 1999 Kosova migrant situation. Work with the Independent Asylum Commission underlined for her the importance of sanctuary for migrants often finding themselves destitute. RESTORE was involved in the following:

- Befriending: patient listening, respect, stimulate courage & resilience.
- Local holiday programmes: at low travel & accommodation costs.
- Advocacy: legal status, deportation issues, political action.
- Accommodation: obtaining suitable properties & using those unoccupied.
- Pregnant mothers: providing a centre properly equipped with staff & interpreters.
- Fund-raising: maintaining & finding individual, public & corporate donors.
- Vouchers: encouragement of face-value purchase to provide choice & avoid exploitation.

Discussion groups: reflected on the two presentations and formulated questions to a panel comprising the two speakers. There was some pessimism about the vulnerability of groups such as migrants to economic stress. On the optimistic side, a necessity to solve problems quickly may reduce the threat. Raising public awareness at the national level needed to be linked to more publicity for Christian opinion. At parish level, reliable information to counter press misinformation, the importance of motivation of laity and clergy and the necessity for concerted action at the social, liturgical and practical support levels was stressed.

Workshops: small groups considered a wide range of topics: Campaigning, Befriending, the Bishop's Pastoral Document on Migrants, Violence, Homelessness, Environmental Migration, Faith and Migration, Spirituality in the Community, with two workshops continuing environmental themes from last year, Operation Noah and Eco-congregations.

Liturgy: The final event was a moving liturgy devised and led by Ann Farr, linking both the opening reflection and the overall theme of the Assembly. This was achieved through prayers, a Taize chant, readings, quiet reflection and bidding prayers associated with the lighting of candles, concluded by a blessing from Bishop William.

A full and more detailed Report appears on our website, and/or can be obtained on request as a paper copy from the Administrator.

Derek Smith

CAFOD : PURE GOLD?

Joe Andrew

As readers will be aware, the work of CAFOD covers many different areas. Right now, in the lead-up to Christmas, it is promoting World Gifts. At the same time, CAFOD is one of the charities that form the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) which launched an appeal at the end of November for urgently needed funds to help ease the increasingly desperate plight of people affected by the recent upsurge of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These more immediate campaigns and crises do not detract, however, from CAFOD's ongoing work, as is witnessed by the latest progress on the *Unearth Justice* campaign which was launched in 2006.

We must first address this striking paradox: why are countries rich in natural resources, such as gold, often some of the poorest in the world? While gold mining creates huge profits, it can destroy the lives of some of the world's poorest people. The campaign seeks to reveal the hidden harm caused by gold mining.

In the relentless pursuit of gold, communities have been threatened and forced from their lands and homes. Rivers and streams close to mines have been polluted with arsenic, and hillsides and fields have been devastated – the damage lasting long after mines have closed. Honduras, The Philippines and Democratic Republic of Congo have been particularly badly hit, while, as consumers, there is no way of tracing how our gold reaches the shops and knowing what damage it has caused.

So, what is CAFOD's Unearth Justice campaign calling for? The campaign works on a number of levels. CAFOD is calling on governments and multinational businesses to make

changes in mining practices that will end these injustices. In turn, CAFOD works with local partner organisations that witness the impact of mining on poor communities and help people to stand up for their rights.

Through their actions, and with our support, there is hope that gold can be turned from a curse to a blessing for the communities where it is mined. CAFOD is also asking jewellery retailers to make a public commitment to the Golden Rules, pledging to work towards sourcing cleaner gold, both in their own supply chain and across the industry. Last but not least, CAFOD calls on pension funds to find out the impact of the mining companies in which they invest and use their influence as investors to change mining company practices that risk harming people's rights, livelihoods and environment. We too can put pressure on our pension funds to take this kind of action - if 6,000 people email their pension fund, we could have £540m of financial power to pressure mining companies with.

So, in the last two years or so, what has been achieved? Quite a lot! Over 50,000 people in England and Wales have taken action with CAFOD to clean up dirty gold. They have successfully persuaded seven major jewellery chains to sign up to the Golden Rules. Now the industry as a whole is beginning to address these issues. They have set up the Council for Responsible Jewellery Practices to develop social and environmental standards, and CAFOD is calling on the Council to ensure its standards are based on the Golden Rules and are independently monitored and verified. Meanwhile, CAFOD campaigners continue to keep up the pressure on jewellers, and mining companies to ensure that these standards are strong enough to clean up dirty gold.

As always, for more information about how to put pressure on companies, pension firms or government go to the CAFOD website:

www.cafod.org.uk/campaigning/unearth-justice

Paint the Church Green

A group Course Ellen Teague (Kevin Mayhew £5.99)

This booklet enables church groups to explore the relationship between faith and concern for the natural world. By learning about environmental issues, unsustainable development and the link with global poverty, it reflects on the Western lifestyle and encourages positive suggestions for change.

Particularly suitable for ecumenical Lenten groups the sessions are designed to take place over six weeks: *People and Planet*; *Food & Drink*; *Battling the Elements*; *Energy for the Future*; *Abundant Life*; *Covenant with Creation*.

Each agenda encourages groups to share their experiences, followed by biblical reflection, tips to help churches bring about change and a concluding prayer.

Diary Dates

December

- 1st World AIDS Day
- WHO: www.worldaidsday.org
- 5th Great Big Christmas Sing
- Christian Aid 0121 303 2323
7pm. St Martin in the Bullring - £10.
- 10th U.N. Human Rights Day
www.unmeditation.org
- 15th RESTORE Open Evening
7.30 to 9.30pm All Saints Church,
Herbert Rd, Small Heath, B'ham.
restoreadmin@birminghamchurches.org.uk
- 20th Christmas Concert for Human Rights - Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture & Amnesty Int.
11.30am. St Philips Cathedral,
Colmore Row, Birmingham - £5.

January

- 1st World Day of Prayer for Peace
- 18th Peace Sunday "Combating Poverty, Building Peace".
- Pax Christi 020 8203 4884 and
www.paxchristi.org.uk
- 18th World Day for Migrants & Refugees
www.catholic-ew.org.uk
- 18th-25th Week for Prayer for Christian Unity: "Reconcile Your People"
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
0207 654 7254 or www.ctbi.org.uk
- 27th Holocaust Memorial Day
www.hmd.org.uk
- 31st-8 Feb. Poverty & Homelessness Action Week:
"Voices from the Edge"
- Housing Justice and
- Church Action on Poverty
www.actionweek.org.uk for free resources on-line.

February

- 5th "Voices from the Edge " drama.
- Carrs Lane Church Centre, Jo Merrygold
Email: leader@carrslane.co.uk
- 6th Lecture: "St Thomas Aquinas' Understanding of Human Freedom"
- 5pm. Blackfriars, St Giles, Oxford.
- 20th World Day of Social Justice
- United Nations
www.libertsecurity.org
- 23rd-9 March FAIRTRADE Fortnight
- 28th Network of Oxford Women for Justice & Peace conference
"Building Alliance for Joint Action Against War"
Email: bettejones@ntlworld.com
- ## March
- 6th CAFOD Lenten Fast Day

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, contact details below.

If you have an event you would like advertised in the Spring newsletter please send details to:

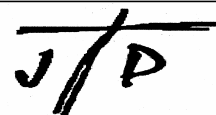
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More information about the Commission can be found on our website: www.birminghamjandp.org.uk

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