

## **Stewards of Creation -**

A report of Birmingham Diocesan Assembly 2007

Climate Change has steadily moved up the political agenda and claims ever more attention in the media. What is the Christian or for that matter any religious person to make of it? How are we to respond in our own personal or community lives? How does this relate to Living Simply? This was the background to the Third Diocesan Assembly Day organized by the Justice and Peace Commission. It took place on Saturday October 13th at St Peter's Catholic School Solihull. This year too there was a wonderful response from people from all over the diocese, nearly 200 attended coming together, to listen, learn, share and pray.

Bishop Kenney addressed us at the start of the day and spoke out of his many years of personal experience of work for justice and peace in many parts of the world. He urged us to continue to work for peace and justice and to realise that all the efforts we make individually or as a group, however small or insignificant they seem, can and do make a difference. We must never lose hope. We were very pleased that Bishop William was able to spend the whole day with us.

Our main speakers this year were Fr Sean McDonagh, Columban Father and well known theologian and writer on justice and the environment and Ellen Teague, journalist and campaigner on justice, peace and ecology. Sean illustrated very graphically from his own experience in the Philippines and around the world and from his own extensive studies, the challenge facing this generation as the world climate changes. New conditions are being created which will affect agriculture and ecology on a massive scale. One catastrophic effect will be the rise in sea water levels which will see low lying land inundated and its millions of inhabitants forced to move to find safer ground. The vast majority of scientists from all over the world believe on the basis of sound evidence that the burning of fossil fuels and the release of carbon thereby increasing greenhouse gases is behind this change which is having and will have an increasingly detrimental effect on the health of the climate of our planet. Action is urgently needed now at all levels to try to avert this crisis which will affect the generations to come. As usual, he pointed out; it is the poor who will suffer most, though their lifestyles are less damaging to the global environment. The pressures of

climate change today are a factor in the violence in Darfur and in other parts of the world. A new challenge is presented by the demand for oil as new nations industrialise and the net global amount of oil has reached a peak and will steadily diminish. We need new, more environmentally friendly alternatives.

Ellen spoke about some of the practical steps we can take to change our thinking and our lifestyles to minimise and correct the harm our lifestyles cause and how we can campaign for the global action needed to save the world. We do this from the background of a theology which teaches us that the world is God's creation of which we form a part with the endless variety of animate and inanimate life. We are stewards charged with caring for the earth not destroying it by our greed, selfishness and shortsightedness.

The afternoon workshops, of which there was a choice of ten, gave further opportunity for learning and sharing. Many of them were related to climate change and the care of creation but others addressed peace issues and practical responses to the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in our midst.

After a full and enjoyable day we left to go back to our parishes with a new awareness of the challenge of climate change, our duty as Christians to respond and the challenge to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor.

For more on Justice and Peace in the diocese and useful links see [www.birminghamjandp.org.uk](http://www.birminghamjandp.org.uk)