



# Birmingham Justice and Peace Commission Newsletter



[www.birminghamjandp.org.uk](http://www.birminghamjandp.org.uk)

Issue 31

Winter 2015/16

## Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

The Year of Mercy has started! We are obviously encouraged to look into our own hearts and recognise those areas that we are unhappy with and the need for God's mercy.

But having experienced the mercy of God ourselves, we then need to show mercy to others. How else will people in need recognise the mercy of God except when it is shown to them by ourselves? We who have experienced mercy must in turn grant it to others.

What better way to do this than by working for justice and peace! Those of you who are already doing J&P work are already carrying out exactly what Pope Francis is asking for and his intention for this Holy Year. "True mercy," he says, "the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice". (Address to Jesuit Refugee Service, September 2013).

This Year then offers us a unique and profound opportunity to bring justice and peace to more people. Perhaps this is a time for us to examine our effectiveness and re-energise our efforts, to improve on what we do and strive harder still for a world desperately in need of love, peace and justice.

God be with you in this coming year and may He bless everything that you do.

Fr Gerry Murray (Chair)

**Some important dates in 2016, replacing the "Dates" back page,  
regular updates being sent in Mini-Newsletters and subsequent full Newsletters.**

**2016: Important dates** [click on titles for links to information and resources]

**17th January 2016: Peace Sunday [Pax Christi]**

**17th January 2016: World Day of Refugees and Migrants [Vatican Network]**  
**JRS Prayer Pack on our website here**

**24th January 2016: Homeless Sunday [Housing Justice]**

**24th January 2016: Racial Justice Sunday [Catholic News]**

**7th February 2016: Church Action on Poverty Sunday [CAoP]**

**29th February - 13th March: Fairtrade Fortnight [Fairtrade Foundation]**

**15th—17th July: National Justice & Peace Network Conference, Swanwick, Derbyshire**

**Saturday 15th October: Birmingham J&P Annual Assembly, St Peter's School, Solihull**

## Opening Address and Faith Reflection given on 17th October 2015 at the J&P Assembly by Bishop David McGough

Indifference to the many inequalities that divide the rich from the poor. Indifference to the manipulation of the earth's finite resources, leading to gross inequalities between nations, and bringing in its wake unrest, war and the displacement of people.

I'm sure that there are many reasons for this indifference. However, indifference can never become an excuse. I'm reminded of the cautionary tale in Saint Luke's Gospel, the story of the poor man Lazarus who had languished unnoticed at the door of the rich man.

As the story unfolds, and the rich man, after dying, discovers a gulf between himself and his God, it emerges very clearly that indifference was his sin. He simply hadn't noticed the poor man on his doorstep. (Luke 16:19ff)

If you put that story into the context of globalisation, it surely means that the developed nations are not sufficiently aware of the poor nations, the Lazarus dying on their doorsteps. It could be that the comforts we take for granted have become a kind of tranquilliser dulling our sensitivities. The dignity that we safeguard so jealously for ourselves becomes indifferent to the plight of others.

An outsider, looking from afar, might think that we are sleepwalking into disaster, both for ourselves and for our planet.

Since you last came together Pope Francis has given us a strong lead...both in his Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, and in his call for a Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Another thing has changed radically since your last assembly. The Poor man Lazarus, in the guise of the refugees flooding our newscasts, is daily knocking on our door.

I am, of course, referring to the current refugee crisis and the way in which it is being handled. I'm sure that in the coming months we shall hear strong reactions both from the left and from the right.

Those of us who are Christians, in reacting to this crisis, must hold tight to our deepest identity. We must understand afresh the genesis of our relationship with God. Let us go back to what is in fact the oldest Creed of the peoples of the Old and New Testaments.

"My Father was a wandering Aramean, who went down into Egypt with a small number. The Egyptians

oppressed us and inflicted harsh slavery. But we called on the Lord, the God of our ancestors. The Lord heard our voice and saw our misery; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt. He has brought us here and given us this land flowing in milk and honey." Deuteronomy 26: 5ff

This ancient Creed enshrines the history of our salvation. It is a history of migration from oppression to freedom. It began with Abram, called by his Lord to abandon his homeland and set out for a land that the Lord would show him (cf. Genesis 12).

This pattern was reiterated in the call of Moses. The God of Israel revealed himself to Moses as the one who had heard the cry of his people, who had come to set them free and lead them to a flowing with milk and honey (Cf Exodus 3: 7ff). There is an unmistakable pattern. Our relationship with God is initiated not by ourselves, but by the God who hears our cry, who leads us from sin to salvation. The Law entrusted to Moses was prefaced with reference to a God of compassion, a God who hears the cry of the poor. It made special reference to the plight of the alien.

"You will not molest or oppress aliens, for you yourselves were once aliens in Egypt. You will not ill-treat widows and orphans; if you ill treat them in any way and they make appeal to me for help, I shall certainly hear their appeal. You know how the alien feels, for you yourselves were once aliens in the land." Exodus 22.20ff & 23:9

The prophets of Israel, Israel's conscience, constantly reiterated this call to care for the stranger in our midst, for the most vulnerable, those without a voice.

Jesus came as the fulfilment of all that had been promised to Moses. He defined his ministry as an act of mercy to the afflicted, the captive, the blind and afflicted. (Cf. Luke 4:16ff)

We, who have known his mercy, will be judged according to the same standard of mercy.

"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you. Then the King will answer: In truth, I tell you, in so far as you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me." Matthew 25: 33ff

Surely these are the only thoughts that can guide our reaction to the current refugee crisis.

Finally, my thanks for your untiring work in the cause of Justice and Peace.

Bishop David McGough

# United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Phil Mayland

In September 2015 the United Nations agreed 17 goals, which replace the 8 Millennium Development Goals that came to a conclusion this year. This is a new sustainable development agenda to **end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all**. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years.

I intend to discuss just a few, but the full list is - no poverty - zero hunger - good health and well-being - quality education - gender equality - clean water and sanitation - affordable and clean energy - decent work and economic growth - industry, innovation and infrastructure - reduce inequality within and among countries - sustainable cities and communities - responsible consumption and production - climate action - life below water - life on land - peace, justice and strong institutions - and partnership for the goals. You can find a fully treatment of each one at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/#>.

When I first read through these I felt what a task! Is this just pie in the sky? Do they just point a way towards a feeling of self-satisfaction when I contribute to one of CAFOD's appeals, or can they really be achieved? Really? I want to examine one or two of these goals in more detail.

## On extreme poverty:

Twenty-five years ago, the U.N. had the target to end poverty. What has happened? In 1990 there were 1.9 billion people living in extreme poverty. Today there are 836 million. That is more than a billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty, well over half.

## On hunger:

In 1990 almost a quarter (23.3%) of the population of developing countries were under-nourished. Today the proportion has fallen by almost a half to 12.9%. However, there are still about 795 million people living with hunger, about 1 in 9 of the world's population.

## On health:

17,000 fewer children die each day than in 1990, but more than 6 million die annually before the age of 5. Since 1990 measles vaccinations have averted nearly 16 million deaths. Maternal mortality has fallen by almost 50%.

## On education:

Enrolment in primary schools in developing countries

is approximately 91%, but 57 million still do not go to school. The world has achieved equality between girls and boys at primary level, but this is not sustained at secondary level and beyond. The literacy rate among the young, 15 to 24 year olds has improved globally from 83% to 91% since 1990.

## On gender equality:

In South Asia only 74 girls were enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys in 1990. By 2012 the ratios were the same for girls and boys.

The picture I am attempting to paint is one of success. There has grown up what I will term a Development Community made up of governments of developing countries, governments of richer countries who contribute to aid; United Nations Agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), and others working in this field. Working together we have seen remarkable progress towards achieving the goals. On the other hand there is clearly a lot more to be done. And the more intractable problems and situations still remain to be tackled.

So I want to answer my own question, is this pie in the sky? Can we achieve these goals? Clearly, from the progress outlined above, the answer must be yes. It is possible.

However, there are some seemingly insurmountable hurdles ahead. I will outline just a couple:

Conflict and war always impacts negatively on development. What is our role in conflict? The arms trade? Nuclear weapons? How are we responsible?

## Combating inequality:

Just as progress has been made in development terms, there is an ever increasing progress in the inequalities within nations and between nations. This is a grave injustice which must be challenged. I also want to mention the growth of large multi-national corporations, many of whom, in their pursuit of profit, contribute to the devastation of land, to global warming and prevent the development of peoples. And these companies are richer and more powerful than many National Governments.

Climate change is probably the biggest threat to the development of peoples we have ever faced. Floods, droughts, magnitude of storms, rising sea levels, desertification, melting glaciers, water shortages, all threaten the work of development and in many parts of the world are reversing the progress already achieved. The recent COP21 talks in Paris ended with an historic agreement that all countries will tackle this problem.

Continued.....

## United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

.....Continued:

We are no longer debating whether action on climate change is necessary but what actions need to be taken and how this is to be achieved.

In researching the Sustainable Development goals, I take heart from the progress already achieved. Yes, we can achieve more. However, there are some extremely difficult problems to be overcome. I am frequently reminded of Our Lord's (possibly) most well-known parable, the parable of the good Samaritan. When I am told that Climate Change is not something we should be concerned about, or that the Church should not be concerned with politics, I ask myself, do I want to be the person passing by on the other side? or am I supposed to be the one who helps?

Pope Francis' recent encyclical *Laudato Si'*, together with the rest of the Church's Social Teaching, is quite clear about how we must respond.

## Volunteers invested 231,000 hours into Christian led Night Shelters in the past year: a Housing Justice report.

On Thursday 10th December Housing Justice, the national Christian voice of housing and homelessness, launched the Church and Community Night Shelters report which aimed to capture some of the significant impacts and contributions made by Christians working in the homelessness sector in England Wales, either as paid or volunteers.

Within the past year, an estimated 231,000 volunteer hours have been invested into Night Shelters including within that a separate 70,000 volunteering attendances.

Housing Justice collected data from 34 Night Shelters across the UK, showing that around 500 churches and Church Halls opened their premises for use as Night Shelters between October 2014 and May 2015.

2,171 guests were accommodated through these 500 venues. Asking where guests came from, 21% of respondents said they were on the street long term. Of this, 86% of shelter guest said they were long term street homeless with 14% of those expressing a disability.

Of the guests, 43% were UK in nationality, with 49% being non EU. This compares to 51% and 47% respectively from the previous year.

Only 14% of those using Shelters were female, broadly the same as the previous year.

In terms of how long Shelters were open, Together in Barnet were the first shelter to open its doors on October 20th and the Growth project in Tower Hamlets and the Westminster project both ran through as late as the end of May 2015. The majority of shelter projects closed their doors at the end of March.

Sharing their motive for serving in a Night Shelter, one volunteer said: "Almost everybody that I have come into contact with doing this work have had their attitudes to the homeless seriously changed. One of the problems that you come across time and time again with this sort of thing from the outside community from the neighbours is that they have real fears about the homeless."

Speaking at the launch of the Shelter Impact Report, Alison Gelder, Housing Justice Chief Executive said "I think it is vital that churches stand in the gaps left by statutory services as well as arguing and campaigning for those services to be improved (or even for funding to be restored)."

The homeless guests in our report are mainly (86%) single men over the age of 17 but under 60. This is in large part because there is no duty on Local Authorities to provide accommodation for people who are not in priority need. It is even worse for folk who are migrants (from whatever country) or British citizens who have returned home after a period living abroad.

Almost one in five guests (18%) in the report are people from outside the UK with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). They are not eligible for benefits and struggle to find any official help. Some of them are at work, saving for a deposit to be able to rent somewhere, some are struggling with mental ill health and addictions, some are taciturn, some are chatty – but they all have dignity!

*Alison Gelder*

***NB.** This is an extract from a Press Release issued in December; further details of the full report can be obtained by contacting Housing Justice tel. 020 3544 8094 or Email [info@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:info@housingjustice.org.uk), or from Emma Neill of the Birmingham Christian Homelessness Forum by Email [e.neill@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:e.neill@housingjustice.org.uk)*

# The Paris Agreement on Climate Change

Philip Mayland

Five CAFOD Supporters from Birmingham Diocese, Jane Lavery from Alvechurch, Phil Mayland from Newcastle under Lyme, Brendan Noonan and Kris Pears from Coventry and Jim Quinn from Redditch have returned from Paris after travelling to the city to call for world leaders to tackle climate change.

They were in the French capital from Wednesday 9 December until Sunday 13 December, as representatives of more than 190 countries gathered in the city to agree action for tackling climate change. They travelled for the end of the talks, known as COP21, with Catholic aid agency CAFOD, to call for an agreement to prevent the changing climate from pushing people deeper into poverty.

Jane, Jim, Kris, Brendan and Phil joined Catholic campaigners from different continents who travelled to Paris following a letter from Pope Francis which calls for the protection of people and planet. The campaigners visited the conference centre where negotiations were taking place and sent a message to UK Energy Secretary Amber Rudd to say they were waiting for a deal which would reduce and eventually eliminate fossil fuel usage, and also protected the poorest peoples from the effects of Climate Change. They later took part in a demonstration with thousands of people near the Eiffel Tower as negotiations reached their tense final hours.

Phil said: One of our group, Judith, had previously participated in a 30-strong walking pilgrimage from London to Paris. They helped present our petitions, together with petitions from all over the world, (1 780 543 names), to Christiana Figueres, U.N. Executive Secretary of the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Last Thursday Judith, with three others, presented our petitions to President Hollande, at the Elysee Palace.

“CAFOD’s visit was a real inspiration. We met and shared experiences with campaigners from many European countries and from Canada. We listened to women from Malawi, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and South Africa tell us of the problems caused by drought, and by the chemicals they are encouraged to use. We heard from The Philippines about the effects of Climate Change on rising sea levels and increased ferocity and frequency of typhoons.

A couple of very moving moments were seeing a video of the effects of typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) and listening to two poets from the Philippines and Samoa, both countries seriously threatened. I recall the closing line “The sea used to feed us, but now the sea itself is hungry.”

The Paris Agreement is being hailed as the start of a new era of action on climate change, committing countries to limit the rise in temperatures and signalling the transition away from fossil fuels. The Agreement also states the link between climate change and its impact upon people in the world’s poorest communities and the responsibility of richer nations to financially support countries most vulnerable to adapt to the effects of the changing climate.

Phil said “This agreement is historic. The aim is to limit global warming to 2 degrees with a recognition that this needs to come down to 1.5degrees if the worst effects of climate change are to be avoided. However, it should be seen as a guide for future actions and not as the final solution to climate change. We need to develop legally binding agreements so countries can be held to account. We need to put human rights, food security and land use at the heart of future agreements, so that the needs of the poorest peoples and those hit hardest by the extremes of climate change are satisfied.

The fact that more than 190 countries have been able to sign up to the Paris Document is a positive step forward. **We are no longer debating whether action on climate change is necessary but what actions need to be taken and how this is to be achieved.”**

Pope Francis’ contributions to the international debate this year have been massively important. We all need to familiarise ourselves with the encyclical *Laudato Si’* and respond to his plea for a personal ecological conversion, by making changes in our own lifestyles and living more simply. There are many really good suggestions for living more simply on the CAFOD website: [www.cafod.org.uk](http://www.cafod.org.uk)

On Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December the Holy Father remarked “With the hope that special attention for the most vulnerable populations is guaranteed, I exhort the whole international community to proceed on the path undertaken at COP21 in the name of an ever more effective solidarity.”

*Phil Mayland*

## News From Pax Christi

Ann Kelly

I write this in the aftermath of the tragic events in Beirut and Paris, and as voices for war are raised ever louder in response. At such a time, the need to reflect on the gospel of peace is even more imperative.

Among others, Pax Christi International, in its' statement on the killings in Beirut and Paris, reminded us that revenge and escalating violence are not the answer to the threats that we face:

*"..In reflecting about those cruel events we believe that this is not about the people in Beirut and Paris only; this is about our human community, which keeps struggling to find ways to appropriately deal with terror and violence. We need to find them for this nonsensical bloodshed to stop.*

*It keeps being so easy to use armed violence in revenge, to justify it as the best way to solve ongoing bloody conflicts, and to offer it to citizens as the only source of security; however, military operations distract us from core components of this terror. Terrorist groups, such as the so-called Islamic State, keep increasing their wealth and their military power and for that to stop, a number of international connections have to be cut. So far, guns have not helped us to eradicate violent extremism; state institutions need to be far more creative and transparent in finding ways to do it, backed by imaginative responses already being developed by civil society organizations.."*

### Peace Sunday will be observed on 17<sup>th</sup> January.

In his letter to parishes for Peace Sunday, Pax Christi UK President Archbishop Malcolm McMahon writes: In his World Peace Day message this year "Overcome Indifference and Win Peace" Pope Francis invites us to reflect on how we can hope for peace without working

to challenge the causes of violence and injustice in our world today. Time and again Pope Francis has spoken of our 'throw-away culture' which dehumanises and destroys the human person whether through war and conflict or economic injustice. On Peace Sunday, we have an opportunity learn from this message and put our faith into action.

Now more than ever it is important to ensure that Peace Sunday is observed in your parish. Resources for Peace Sunday will have been sent to your parish in November, and can also be downloaded at: [www.paxchristi.org.uk](http://www.paxchristi.org.uk). They include bidding prayers, sermon notes and draft items for parish newsletters – so please make use of them!

During Advent, as we prepared for the arrival of the Prince of Peace, Pax Christi International member organisation Arab Educational Institute / Youth Media House, which hosted Pax Christi's 70th anniversary gathering in May 2015, received Emails of peace and solidarity and shared them with others in Bethlehem and the West Bank.

Now we are in 2016 take a moment to send a message to our friends in Palestine who live each day under a military occupation, with border checks and severely restricted movement. Make contact through this website or with Pax Christi direct: <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/during-advent-and-christmas-send-messages-peace-and-hope-bethlehem/5170#sthash.NuTe89xs.dpbs>

Ann Kelly

### 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.

If you have a contribution you would like included in the Spring 2016 newsletter please send it for consideration to:

David Jenkins, Administrator, J&P Commission,  
Home: Yew Tree Cottage, Hailey, Witney OX29 9UB  
Email: [jenkins@woxon.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:jenkins@woxon.freeserve.co.uk)  
Tel: 01993-702654 (home), 07919 325203 (mobile).

**Spring 2016 Edition: Last date for copy 1st March.**

More information about the Commission can be found on our website: [www.birminghamjandp.org.uk](http://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 Diocese Justice and Peace Commission



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

For downloads from the J&P Resource Pack and much more.....access our website:

[www.birminghamjandp.org.uk](http://www.birminghamjandp.org.uk)