



Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

As I write this we are entering into Holy Week and the country is about to enter the final period of preparation for the General Election in early May. Much material has already appeared to help us focus on the important issues we might want to take up with our local candidates.

In this issue Brian Davies highlights for us some of the issues of concern to justice and peace people. Hopefully his summary will be of help to us as we decide how to use our own vote and how with others we can discover and examine the views and attitude of our local candidates.

I hope you will be able, with other churches and groups be able, to be part of local events meeting the candidates and asking them the questions that are of importance, locally and nationally.

Meantime I wish you the peace and joy of Easter and a renewed sense of the hope the Risen Lord brings.

With best wishes,

Fr Gerry Murray (Chair)

National Justice and Peace Network Annual Conference

Annual Justice & Peace Conference 17th to 19th July

"The Things That Make for Peace"

*Exploring the real threats to human security and
how we can work together to build a more peaceful world*

Booking form attached/enclosed and from NJPN, 39 Eccleston Square,
London SW1V 1BX tel. 020 7901 4864 Email admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk

Preparing for the General Election

Brian Davies

We are better provided with resources for the forthcoming election than ever before. They vary in what they say but there is much common ground. In particular the letter addressed to their people from the Catholic Bishops is very different from the Anglican Bishops' one to theirs. It's worth reflecting on how we might use them.

Who is my neighbour?

This letter from the House of Bishops to the People & Parishes of the Church of England is an altogether more philosophical work, reflecting on what the approach of Christians to the General Election should be. As a result of what it sees as a lack of vision on the part of *all* the parties, it seeks a fresh moral vision about the kind of society we want to be and how we might go about building it.

The Bishops urge that "instead of treating politics as an extension of consumerism, we should focus on the common good, the participation of more people in developing a political vision and constructive ways to talk about communities and how they relate to one another". They point out that consumption rather than production has come to define us, while individualism and competition have tended to estrange people from one another. If we are to be a "community of communities" rather than a "society of strangers", we need a political vision which reaffirms the bonds which tie us together. So Housing Associations and Credit Unions are highlighted as good examples of informal structures which draw on the principle of mutuality. At the same time, if people feel part of the decision-making processes that affect their lives, social diversity can flourish. In other words, there is recognition of the fundamental importance of both **solidarity** and **subsidiarity**.

The letter also refers to the Biblical tradition of "bias to the poor". It warns against too much power falling into too few hands and deplores the growing inequality in Britain. This recurrent theme echoes the Catholic "Option for the Poor". Overall, the letter rather resembles **The Common Good**, the document of the Catholic Bishops in preparation for the 1997 Election. Indeed, there is explicit reference to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching which were so well set out in that statement.

The letter is particularly insightful in dealing with the politics of migration which has often been crudely framed in terms of "us" and "them" with scant regard for Christian traditions of neighbourliness and hospitality. It also makes a strong point about the austerity created

by the debt crisis which should not have imposed the greatest burdens on those least able to bear the load. The growth of in-work poverty is the reason for backing the idea of the living wage, ensuring that all employees earn enough for a full-time worker to live decently. "The moral limits of the market must be recognised."

Finally the Anglican Bishops make clear that it is the duty of every Christian adult to vote. Even if what is offered falls short of the vision, we can work with others to sow the seeds of a new politics. They end by listing the key values we should look for in our candidates so that politics can rise above its present diminished state.

(For full text see www.churchofengland.org/generalElection2015)

The General Election 2015

This letter to Catholics in England & Wales from their Bishops is a much briefer document, consisting essentially of questions that might be raised. "As Catholics, we are called to work for a world shaped by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel proclaims the mercy of God and invites us steadfastly to love God and our neighbour. Our relationship with God leads to the desire to build a world in which respect, dignity, equality, justice and peace are our primary concerns." If we take up Pope Francis' missionary option for the Church, "we can be messengers of hope as we challenge the political candidates about the policies they wish to implement and the reasons why."

The letter highlights a number of key issues which are concerned with the dignity of human life and human flourishing. In each case it suggests a question we might raise with our candidates. The details are listed in the letter which is readily available in every parish.

In presenting the letter, Cardinal Vincent points out that political leaders can choose to appeal to our sense of hope or of fear, to our desires to care for others or for ourselves, and to our sense of solidarity or to our selfishness. "We expect politicians to be committed to the common good. We also each have a responsibility to be involved in the democratic process." The Cardinal urges us to vote: "It is a duty which springs from the privilege of living in a democratic society. In deciding how we vote the question for each one of us is then: How, in the light of the Gospel, can my vote best serve the common good?"

There are two observations about this letter. Firstly, the framework of Catholic Social Teaching (presented some years ago in **The Common Good**) is presupposed.

Secondly, it seems odd that though it refers to peace as a 'primary concern' there are no questions at all about peace.

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Yet the letter does suggest that, prior to casting our vote, we use the following prayer: “Lord, grant us wisdom that we may walk with integrity, guarding the path of justice and knowing the protection of your loving care for all”. That would seem to embrace ‘peace’ as well.

Ask a question: Tackling poverty at home and abroad

CSAN and CAFOD have come together to provide a briefing and questions we should raise in the election on poverty and injustice confronting people at home and abroad.

CSAN’s focus is on in-work poverty and access to an affordable home.

CAFOD’s focus is on the causes of poverty among the most vulnerable and tackling climate change. Further details are available on www.csan.org.uk and www.cafod.org.uk

General Election Briefing 2015 (www.ncpo.org.uk)

Pax Christi and the Network of Christian Peace Organisations have produced a leaflet which points out that as Christians we are called to be peacemakers – to work unceasingly for a world in which all God’s children are treated fairly and with respect – and where unbridled human greed, violence and animosity towards the ‘other’ are no longer acceptable in a civilised society. “Our vision of peace is based on right relationships between people and with God: on justice, trust, mercy and respect. As people of faith we have a responsibility to turn our vision into something real by engaging in non-violent work for political change that will ensure the common good”.

The briefing highlights that at £38 billion last year the UK had the sixth largest military spending in the world; and it was also sixth in the global arms trade market. Last year it exported arms to both Russia and Ukraine and continued selling arms to Israel during its Gaza operation.

It is important to note that in early 2016 the decision will be taken by the new parliament on whether to replace Trident nuclear missiles. The cost is likely to be well over £100 billion over the next 35 years. This would commit the UK to possessing nuclear weapons for decades, at a time when the rest of the world – and not least the Church – is striving to ban all nuclear weapons. The policy of nuclear deterrence is nothing other than a threat to other countries that we will indeed use them as a ‘last resort’. We should note that six Catholic Bishops have signed the “Scrap Trident” declaration, including Archbishop Malcolm McMahon and our own Bishop William Kenney.

THE SUFFERING OF THE SYRIAN PEOPLE CONTINUES

Joe Andrew

For many of us the news agenda these days can seem very odd. Although we now have 24-hour news, there seem to be actually fewer stories, and narrower coverage. Equally, once a story is deemed important, it gets blanket coverage, but then completely disappears. So, for weeks Ebola was in the news, but now we hardly ever hear about it. Greece and Ukraine are other cases in point.

So too is Syria. The suffering of millions of ordinary Syrians continues, day after day, but their ongoing ordeal is not dominating the news. To mark the fourth anniversary of the start of the conflict in Syria CAFOD, as part of #WithSyria – a global coalition of 130 aid agencies and civil society groups from around the world – is calling for more to be done to stop the conflict and to get humanitarian aid to communities in need.

In the middle of March the #WithSyria coalition released a hard-hitting film and launched a global petition calling on world leaders to stop flinching from doing more to bring this devastating conflict to an end.

The numbers of people caught up in the Syria crisis today are staggering. Since the conflict started on 15 March 2011, more than 12.2 million people have been forced to flee their homes. In 2014 alone, an average of 200 people – the equivalent of two double-decker busloads – were killed every day.

Our partner, Bishop Antoine Audo, Director of Caritas Syria, based in Aleppo, told us that the human suffering is greater than ever before: “This war has destroyed whole neighbourhoods, not forgetting the booming industries that were in Syria as well as the farming. Half of Syrians are either homeless or living as refugees in neighbouring countries. Eighty per cent of the workforce in Aleppo have no work. The rich have left, the middle class have become poor and the poor have become destitute.”

As part of the #WithSyria campaign CAFOD is calling for world leaders to commit to several things. These include finding a political and inclusive agreement to bring the conflict to an end; calling on both sides in the conflict to end indiscriminate attacks against civilians; and financing a humanitarian aid response.

CAFOD’s Emergency Manager for the Syria Crisis, Alan Thomlinson, said: “The extreme hardship already endured by millions of Syrians will only grow worse as the violence in Syria continues to spiral.

(NB. Abbreviated extract from the full article in Catholic Today.

Diary Dates

Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.

MARCH

29th: Passion Sunday

APRIL

3rd: Good Friday

5th: Easter Day

13th: Global Day of Action on Military Spending

Information from Pax Christi and International Peace Bureau website www.ipb.org

17th to 19th: Fellowship of Reconciliation Conference - see www.for.org.uk/events

18th: United Nations Earth Day
See www.earthday.org

MAY

23rd: Beatification of Archbishop Romero
expected to take place in El Salvador's Capital City. Several events planned within the UK, details to follow.

JUNE

6th and 20th: Caritas Archdiocese of Birmingham Workshops on Homelessness
in Lichfield (Holy Cross Centre) and Banbury (St.John's Community Centre). For details see Mini-Newsletter 2015 no.6 on the J&P Commission website, and on the CSAN website. You choose which day to attend and which workshop - you can of course come to both days if you wish to experience both workshops. Cost for each will be £5 .

JUNE (cont.)

17th: "Speak Up For The Love Of..." CAFOD
and [The Climate Coalition](http://www.theclimatecoalition.org) lobby of Parliament in London and a chance to tell your MP about the things you love that you could lose to climate change. Buses from Birmingham Diocese being organised.

JULY

17th to Annual NJPN Conference :
"The Things That Make For Peace"
for details see front page.

OCTOBER:

2nd: CAFOD Harvest Fast Day

10th: J&P Commission Annual Assembly :

"Changing the Unjust Structures of Society"

In St Peter's Secondary School, Solihull. from 10.30am until 4pm. With a guest speaker yet to be confirmed and a wide choice of issue-based workshops as always.

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 2015 newsletter please send details to:

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Summer 2015 Edition: Last date for entries 1st June.

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 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