

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

As you will shortly read in this bulletin I recently had the joy of celebrating the Golden Jubilee of my priestly ordination and 75th birthday with family, friends and many parishioners from my present and past parishes.

A constant feature of my life as a priest for over 30 years has been in the service of peace and justice in our diocese. This has brought me into contact with many people and situations over the years. I don't think I or we can claim any great achievements but I prefer to think of it as keeping a light shining for justice and peace in our changing and often challenging world.

Justice and Peace in theory and practice is a key part of the Good News we are called to live out and witness to. I want to thank the many inspiring people I have met over the years and thank them for their support and inspiration over the years. May the Lord bless us all with his love and peace and give us the oil to keep our lamps of faith and love alight and shining brightly.

Kind regards

Fr. Gerard Murray

(Chair)

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Dates for your diary:

Dates for 2024

Tuesday 19th November Commission meeting, 11am

Tuesday 26th November Discussion Forum 7pm

All Justice and Peace Commission Meetings are held online via Zoom at 11am.

Date for 2025

Saturday 31st May Retreat at St. Pauls Convent
Selly Park

The Forum meetings are on Zoom at 7pm
Recording of Forums can be viewed on YouTube
<https://bit.ly/BirminghamJP>



Canon Gerard Murray

On Wednesday 25th September 2024 there was a special Mass in the Parish of Sacred Heart and the English Martyrs. It was to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the ordination into the priesthood of Canon Gerard Paul Murray. It was also his 75th Birthday Celebration. There to give the homily was Archbishop Emeritus Kevin McDonald. Archbishop Kevin and Canon Gerard went to Rome in 1968 and were ordained Priests for the Archdiocese of Birmingham in 1974. Canon Gerry was actually ordained on the 3rd August 1974 but choose to celebrate his ordination and 75th birthday at the same time.



I am delighted to add a word of thanks and congratulations to Canon Gerard Murray in the year in which he celebrates the Golden Jubilee of his Ordination to the Priesthood and his 75th birthday.

I am immensely grateful to Canon Gerard for his steadfast work across the Archdiocese for Justice and Peace and his leadership as Chairman of the Justice and Peace Commission over many years. In various parish settings and through the Commission's work, Canon Gerard has inspired others to know, understand and implement the Catholic Church's social teaching and to share this with other Christians, other faith communities and people of goodwill. I am also very grateful to Canon Gerard for highlighting issues of Justice and Peace as a member of the Metropolitan Chapter and especially when the Chapter offers advice and guidance to me as our diocesan College of Consultors

I wish Canon Gerard every blessing as his work for Justice and Peace continues in the years ahead.

Please be assured of my thanks for all that you do, together with my prayers and kindest wishes.

Yours sincerely in Christ

+ Bernard

Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham



Laudato Si' Animators Get Together to Celebrate past Actions and to Discuss Future Actions

On September 29th 2024 during the Season of Creation, 24 Laudato Si' Animators from different parts of England gathered for a Laudato Si' Encounter at the Laudato Si' Centre in Salford.

Laudato Si' Animators are members of the Laudato Si Movement, a global community of prayer and action. We animate our local parishes and communities to engage in ecological spirituality, sustainable lifestyles and advocacy for climate and ecological justice.

Animators work to bring Pope Francis's Encyclical Laudato Si' to life. We are trained by the Laudato Si' Movement to get the message of Pope Francis into the parishes. Most of us knew each other from bi-monthly zoom meetings and taking part in prayer vigils and marches about the climate and biodiversity.

Our Visit to the Centre

The day began with a tour of the Centre given by Emily Cahill, the Centre's environmental and learning officer. She stressed that Bishop John Arnold's vision for the Wardley Hall Centre was that it would be used by everyone as a centre for learning, spirituality and wellbeing.

In four years a lawn has been converted into a thriving garden. The woodland area is ideal for groups. Over 3000 people have visited the centre especially school and parish groups. We were given leaves from various plants to attach to our sheets on which we wrote what inspired us to be animators and what our hopes for the future are. Each of us chose a picture and spoke about it as we introduced ourselves. After a

simple vegan lunch when we were joined by the director of the centre Emma Gardner, we split into groups and noted down our responses. The rain brought us back into the outdoor classroom where Bishop John greeted us all and a photo was taken. Sr Joan Kerley then gave us an inspiring talk about St Hildegard of Bingen and St Kateri and the Haudenosaunee (Iriquois) Creation story. We sang 2 songs about creation and then started to answer the 7 questions that Laudato Si' Movement had given us. We ended with prayers from the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Greetings to the Natural World.

A Laudato Si' Centre in Every Diocese!

One of the suggestions made during the Encounter was for Animators to write to the Bishops and Environmental Leads in their diocese asking:

- have you visited the Laudato Si' centre?
- have you looked in detail at the centre's website and programme?
- do you have the vision to establish something similar in our diocese?

What is needed is some land owned by the Diocese, preferably with woodland and near to public transport. Trained staff would be needed to run the centre supported by volunteers. Disabled access and safeguarding are important. In terms of buildings the outdoor classrooms and portaloos were perfectly adequate. But the most important things are prayer and vision.

How are we to get the message of Pope Francis to clergy and laity? A centre like this would be wonderful for doing just that. A place like this in every diocese would help towards the UK Government's commitment to rewild 30% of our land and sea by 2030, and would be a centre for peace, reconciliation and evangelisation. We were told about young people who had attempted suicide coming to the centre and beginning to find hope again.

Quote from Animator John Woodhouse: "We all responded to the inspiring experience of being in creation. How many children never experience this? So many spend their lives glued to their phones and live in a virtual world. So many have mental health issues.

Laudato Si' needs to be seen as a spiritual and evangelical document. Our young people are pushing us to do so much more and they respond very positively to the message of Pope Francis."



LAUDATO SI' MOVEMENT

Catholics for Our Common Home

Further information from John Woodhouse,
email: johnwoodhousecat@gmail.com

Find out more about becoming a Laudato Si animator:
<https://laudatosianimators.org/the-program/>

Thank for sharing your experience of visiting the Laudato Si Centre.

We are looking into establishing a similar centre for best practice via the Care for Creation Sub-Committee in our Archdiocese. It's very much early days at this stage but we've been in contact with the Salford Diocese and been learning from our friends there a lot.

As you probably know, Phil Mayland has been also reaching out to Laudato Si Animators across the Archdiocese to help us coordinate the environmental work in parishes and deaneries.

Finally, there will be a day of reflection for the clergy of our Archdiocese in November around the topic of Care of Creation. The intention is very much to include Care of Creation into the continuous programme of development for clergy.

I do hope this provides you with some reassurances. Please feel free to get in touch directly if you'd like to make any further suggestions.

With thanks and prayers

Tom Piotrowski



Inter Faith Week

10-17 November
www.interfaithweek.org



Interfaith Vigil October 7th 2024

A young Muslim woman wanted to organise an Interfaith Vigil because she believed in the importance of the different faiths acting together to express concern about the appalling violence unleashed on October 7th and continuing on an unimaginable scale in Gaza, spreading to the West Bank, Lebanon and elsewhere.

She was in touch with sympathetic Orthodox Jews who were anti Zionist and horrified by the way the State of Israel was perpetuating the oppression of the Palestinians, stating that this was in variance with the values of Judaism. She wanted to include Christians in the Vigil but didn't know any and was referred to me.

Through contacts a number of us worked to publicise the event throughout the Christian community, to obtain their support and prepare a contribution. As we were unable to find a member of the clergy to speak at the event we just had to do the best we could. As the initiative had come from the Muslim community who had extended their hand of friendship to us we felt it important to respond.



We had no idea what to expect but wanted to take the opportunity to mourn the terrible suffering on all sides of the conflict and to focus on expressing our love and compassion for the victims, embedded in the life and witness of Christ.

A few of us got together from different denominations and prepared a short address, a Taize chant, a prayer and an invitation to extend the hand of peace amongst all of us in the crowd and to those suffering in such a horrifying situation,

All our emotions are touched in times like these. A variety of emotions were expressed during the vigil. There was a beautiful, heartfelt poem, the Rabbi who increased our understanding of his group's perspective on Judaism and its refusal to be drawn into a position of hatred and violence. There was a speech from a prominent political activist empathising the necessity of putting pressure on our Government to stop the supply of arms to Israel and its complicity with its government and there were other impassioned contributions.

There was a large crowd of over a thousand and it commanded a lot of attention in a public space in the City Centre, outside Waterstones.

We had hoped for a much larger Christian presence. It was intimidating to be such a small group speaking out at such a large event, when none of us had had any experience like this before. We hope that our contribution was meaningful despite being such a "still, small voice".

Gill Myall
gillmyall@talktalk.net



International Children's Trust

The International Children's Trust (ICT) is a small UK based INGO working to improve the lives of vulnerable children, and their families and communities throughout the world. We support the development of children who live with the negatives of poverty and disadvantage in South Asia, Africa and Latin America through channelling funds and technical support to local Partners.

South Asia

Sri Lanka



SERVE is a small NGO based in Moratuwa which works to capacitate poor families to care for their children in an emotionally and physically safe home environment, support their schooling and help them move into adulthood independently. SERVE reaches communities within Colombo, and villages across the districts of Kalutara, Ratnapura and Monaragala. Work includes child protection awareness, pre-school child care, support for school going children to reinforce retention and attainment, parents and womens (mainly mothers) livelihoods training and support, race and culture learning, and child and women's rights awareness.

India



SARTHI is a small NGO based in Patna in Bihar state. It was founded by social workers and particularly aimed to make meaningful international, national and state legislation on child protection, child rights and juvenile justice to local communities. SARTHI traces the families of children who become lost in India's massive railway system and of those found in the street many miles from their home. SARTHI also provide education support for children in poor communities of Patna and vocational training for adolescents, young women and mothers.



Rotary of Madras (ROM) Gummidipoondi Boys Home is in an industrial town in northern Tamil Nadu. The Home is a support programme for boys education and training. They are boys in the surrounding district of Thiruvallur who live in very poor families and are – when identified - either out of school or at risk of becoming out of school due to working or having to look after younger siblings. Boys are enrolled into local schools, provided with shelter, food, friendship

and many activities that support their development, their education and their passage into adulthood.



BISAP is a Chittagong based NGO working to improve the lives of poor people throughout Bangladesh – with a focus on families, children's education and protection, women's empowerment, training and livelihoods, and rights awareness and civic participation. BISAP also delivers emergency relief especially after extreme climate events, including during the current floods, and when populations are on the move. They run schools support programmes (in some cases they have run government schools for refugee and coastal communities) and training for adolescents, and work to prevent child labour.

Africa

Burkina Faso



KEOOGO is based in Ouagadougou, the country's capital city and works with street involved children in particular girls and their babies. It address the immediate health needs of the street children and young people – injury, infection, sexually transmitted infection, introductions to clinic especially for the girls in need of pregnancy testing, pre-,peri and post natal

care, HIV/AIDS screening, and trauma. KEOOGO also has a shelter for ex-street girls and their babies. They provide nutrition and medical care and training for work, and nursery care for the children of the girls and for the children of poor local women delivering early learning and development activities and play, food and nutrition, and preparation for school until such a time as the mothers can assume independence.

Ghana



Youth Alive is based in Tamale – in the north of Ghana and much work is with the traditional and poor communities of the Upper West and Upper East regions of the country. Youth Alive works to reduce forced early marriage, labour, early pregnancy, and domestic work causing children to miss school. It also tackles abuses in school, lack of private toilets in for girls, lack of water provision, lack of schools generally and lack of teachers, lack of health care and more. Work is with all stakeholders: children themselves, parents, other duty bearers for children – health, education, social work, law enforcement professionals and government bodies.

Uganda

The St Josephine Bakhita Children’s Home is based in Pabbo in northern Uganda and is home to 16 refugee children from South Sudan and orphaned children from other parts of Uganda. The Home provides a safe environment, and food and nutrition for the children and supports them to attend local schools. It has been established by Rose Moyoo with

help from her mother – both refugees themselves – with support from Father Moses Pitya David of St Elizabeth’s RC Church in Coventry, and the Rotary Club of Coventry.



Zimbabwe



Chiedza is based in Harare and provides education and food and nutrition for children of poor families in its Childcare Centre. It also runs community programmes in “positive parenting” (prioritising where children are experiencing abuse); providing food and nutrition on a daily basis for 250 individuals and food hampers for HIV positive children and families, training in nutrition for parents; and provision of food support for self-help groups in for 6 HIV/AIDS clinics.

Latin America

Mexico



JUCONI is based in the city of Puebla in Puebla State. It is 65 km south of Mexico City. It was founded by ICT in 1990s to work to rehabilitate street living and working children and their families by providing social work interventions to support education, health, interfamily relationships and planning for a future. The interventions are professional and therapeutic and specifically address levels of violence and abuse in families, schools and communities and the trauma created by experiences of the same.

Ecuador



JUCONI is based in Guayaquil and was founded by ICT in 1996, to test and further the work developed in Mexico. Work is with families in the poor barrios of Guayaquil in particular to prevent street involvement and street working of the children of families living there. ICT supports JUCONI through child sponsorship (currently 31 children) which helps children progress through the JUCONI programme and attend school daily, and through other support gained from small UK based Trusts and Foundations.

Called To Be Peacemakers

Archdiocese of Birmingham Justice and Peace Commission, Annual Assembly.



Our Annual Assembly was held in the Grimshaw Rooms at Saint Chad's Cathedral on October 19th, 2024.

We had chosen the topic of Called to be Peacemakers because the Bishops Conference have recently released their new teaching document with the same name. We invited Bishop William Kenney, one of the co-authors of the document, to speak about this and lead us in the assembly. We also invited Aisling Griffin, the Pax Christi education officer for schools and youth education, to explore further issues about peace and non-violence.

We opened the Assembly with a short Liturgy prepared by Ann Kelly, of Pax Christi. Thank you Ann. Commission member Kris Pears, our M.C. for the day, introduced Bishop William with a very informative biography, including his time as a bishop in Sweden and also as chair of Caritas Europe.

Bishop William began by informing us that the document has the approval of all the bishops. It now affirms the Church's position with regards to the morality of nuclear weapons and the possession of such weapons; the arms trade and dis-armament; and the future, autonomous weapons, terrorism, cyberspace and outer space, and the need to re-direct the huge sums of money currently spent on armaments to the alleviation of poverty and to the Common Good.

The document 'Called to be Peacemakers' is rather long, but at the end of each section there are Action Points. I will include these in this article.



He emphasized that it is immoral to possess nuclear weapons. Pope Francis has made this clear. It follows that we must work, through prayer and public witness, to seek for the UK to forsake its nuclear arsenal, helping to create a world without nuclear weapons. He

informed us that in 2023, we spent £56 billion on our nuclear weapons. This huge amount could, and should, have been used for other purposes. He posed the question what could we spend that sort of money on?

On 'small arms', these are weapons which can be carried by individuals, rather than mounted on vehicles etc, there is a huge trade in these, and the United Kingdom is in the top ten of arms exporters. We hold an Arms Fair every two years, but entry to this Fair is controlled. Bishop William told us that despite the fact that he had a valid pass, he was refused entry. The number of small arms weapons in the world is staggering. He gave us the example of Libya, a few years ago, which was the recipient of weapons for all sides in a civil war.

It is estimated that there are four weapons for every person in Libya now.

Bishop William told us that we need to work towards General and Complete disarmament. He pointed out that we also have to ensure that those employed in making these arms are provided with alternative employment. Solutions towards disarmament need to be step-by-step and will require patience. We also need to ensure that developments in modern technology are used for the Common Good, and not in more and more sophisticated means of killing. Bishop William also made the point that investing in companies producing weapons could be immoral. We

need to be guided by the Vatican document 'Mensuram Bonam', November 2022.(You can read this document on the internet).

We went into discussion groups to consider the points Bishop William had raised. Groups then reported back on the points of their discussions.



Aisling Griffin was invited to speak about the work of Pax Christi. Aisling said that Pax Christi warmly welcomes the document Called to be Peacemakers.

She pointed out that because we are one of the few countries who possess nuclear weapons, that we have a particular responsibility to work for disarmament.



Pax Christi is active in demonstrating publicly for peace and peaceful means of resolving conflict. Each year, on Ash Wednesday, members hold a silent vigil outside the Ministry of Defence. Pax Christi is also a member of ICAN, an International organisation working for peace. In 2017, ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work.

Aisling encouraged us to watch two films. One is an old BBC programme called 'Threads', made long ago and shown recently. This tells the story of what would happen if a nuclear bomb was exploded on Sheffield. It is available on the BBC i-player. The other is a film recently in cinemas called 'Oppenheimer'. It is the story of the scientist who worked on the first atomic bombs. The only ones ever used. We were reminded that this year the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Nihon Hidankyo from Japan, an organisation formed by survivor groups of atomic bomb victims "for its efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons and for demonstrating through witness testimony that nuclear weapons must never be used again".

We were also encouraged to write to our Members of Parliament. This is important. Another step we can take is to encourage our towns and cities to join the Cities for Peace Appeal.

Next year, 2025, will mark the 80th anniversary of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Please join in any of the events marking this. There will be an ICAN week of action 16th to 22nd September.

There will be a Pax Christi webinar about Emerging Technologies, drones and other autonomous weapons, on Wednesday 17th January. Peace Sunday will be 19th January. We all need to learn how to talk about peace issues. Now is a good time to begin as Remembrance Sunday is almost upon us. We could join the Catholic Non-violence Initiative and support their days of action.



In our discussions, one topic was should we wear white poppies? This is a question individuals could consider for themselves.

To conclude, I must mention our MC, Kris Pears, who kept us to time, (almost), and allowed the discussions to flow; thanks, Kris; Ann Kelly, who led our prayers at the beginning and the close of the Assembly; thanks Ann; and of course, our two speakers, Bishop William Kenney, and Aisling Griffin.

Below are the Action Points from the document 'Called to be Peacemakers'. I urge you to read the full document.

Action Points from the section on nuclear weapons:

Through our prayer and public witness, we seek for the UK to:

- ◇ Ultimately forsake its nuclear arsenal, helping to create a world without nuclear weapons
- ◇ Fulfil its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue an end to the nuclear arms race, to advance multilateral disarmament, to refrain from expanding its own arsenal, and to work towards reducing it at the earliest opportunity
- ◇ Sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and, until this point, engage meaningfully with the treaty framework including participating as an observer in future meetings of signatories
- ◇ Redirect the economic, social and political resources spent on nuclear weapons towards promoting the universal common good.

Action Points from the Section about arms and disarmament:

Through our prayer and public witness, we seek to:

- ◇ Encourage the UK to take meaningful steps towards General and Complete Disarmament including support for a new special session on disarmament at the UN General Assembly
- ◇ Build support for a global fund, diverting military expenditure towards promoting peace and integral human development
- ◇ Promote an end to the UK's role in the global arms trade while being mindful of the need for a just transition protecting the livelihoods of people currently working in the manufacture of weaponry
- ◇ Promote the principles laid out in Mensuram Bonam relating to investment in the arms industry.

Action Points on the section on emerging technologies
Through our prayer, public witness, and pastoral service we seek to:

- ◇ Encourage the UK to fulfil its obligations under international treaties such as the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and work towards their universal application and enforcement
- ◇ Promote the agreement of new treaties regulating the use of emerging technology including weaponised drones and lethal autonomous weapons systems, ensuring adequate, meaningful and consistent human supervision
- ◇ Advance a global moratorium on the development and use of lethal autonomous weapons systems, and encourage the UK to redeploy investment towards technology that serves the common good of humanity
- ◇ Ensure that people receive appropriate pastoral care when engaged in the deployment and operation of weaponised drones and other uncrewed weapon systems
- ◇ Support the development of new international frameworks to protect outer space and cyberspace as peaceful environments

I would like to thank Bishop William and Aisling for their inspiration. The Actions described above are for each of us to think about, reflect on and then take the actions we can. We can all do something, (e.g, write to our M.P.) and better still, we can do some things together.

“Through prayer and public witness...”

Phil Mayland.

Member of the Justice and Peace Commission.

October 2024.



What can we do about climate disruption?



Roz Savage MP

COP29, the United Nations climate conference, takes place in Baku, Azerbaijan from 11 to 22 November. The theme is “In Solidarity for a Green World” which is quite a challenge in a world of conflict and climate extremes. The three main areas for negotiation are climate finance for the poorer nations, new pledges on cutting carbon emissions and the beginning of the end of fossil fuels. Pope Francis calls climate change a “road to death” and correctly points out that wealthy countries reliant on fossil fuels, who are contributing to the problem, can make the most difference -- while the ones suffering most from the consequences of these disasters are the poor, those who are forced to leave their homes because of floods, heat waves or drought.

What can we do?

One thing is to pray. At 8am every morning during COP29, from 11 Nov to 22 Nov, there will be 10 minutes of prayer and reflection. This will be on Zoom and led by a team from Green Christian. You can register [here](#) for the zoom link.

Another action Green Christian invites you to join in supporting is the Climate and Nature Bill. For four years, the group campaigning for the CAN Bill, Zero Hour, has been building support for the Bill. It now has good cross-party support of more than 180 MPs. We are now at an exciting and critical moment - the new Lib Dem MP, Dr Roz Savage, was drawn third in the private members' bill ballot, and chose to introduce the CAN Bill into Parliament. The Bill's second reading is Friday 24 January 2025. It is absolutely critical that at least 102 supporting MPs attend the reading. See below for how you can help make this happen.

What it is the CAN Bill?

The Climate and Nature (CAN) Bill is the only plan for a new UK law that addresses the full extent of the climate and nature crisis in line with the most up-to-date science. According to Caroline Lucas, "This bill brings honesty and responsibility back into climate legislation."

The CAN Bill would ensure that the UK:
Makes its fair share of emissions cuts necessary to limit the increase in global temperatures to 1.5°C (the more ambitious end of the Paris Agreement).

Accounts for its entire carbon footprint wherever the emissions occur. This means taking real action on the emissions we cause overseas through the production, trade and transportation of the things we consume.

Halts and reverses the decline of nature by 2030, in line with COP15 commitment. Protects and restores natural and managed ecosystems, for healthy soil and water, increased biodiversity and thriving natural carbon sinks.

Takes responsibility for its harmful impacts on nature around the world. This means being honest about the damage to the environment caused by our financing, investments and consumption; making sure we reduce our global impact on natural resources.

The Bill calls for the creation of a Climate & Nature Assembly that would put forward recommendations for the emergency strategy to Parliament. This group of ordinary citizens, selected at random like a jury, would listen to expert evidence before reaching conclusions on the best way forward. Their

recommendations would be debated in Parliament, but MPs would still have the final say.

The Climate and Nature Bill legislates for justice:

What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8) The Bill's framework has justice at its heart. It provides a just transition, ensuring the most vulnerable are protected. In our increasingly polarised and toxic political space it is our fundamental Christian duty to call for reconciliation and justice. The Climate and Nature Bill is a powerful opportunity to do this. Let's activate our churches and do all we can to back it.



How can I support it?

The Climate and Nature Bill has had its first reading in the House of Commons—it now has a chance to go all the way—and make history.

We must get 100+ supporting MPs attend the Second Reading debate on 24 January 2025. This is the only way we can move the CAN Bill onto the next stage of its journey into law—Committee Stage. Will you ask your MP to attend the Second Reading of the CAN Bill?

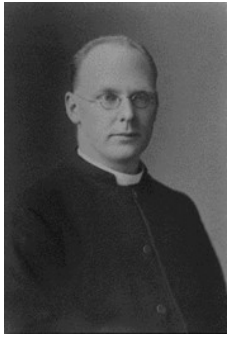
[Yes, I will email my MP now](#)

Let's make history!

Yes, we CAN turn the CAN Bill into a CAN act!

By Barbara Echlin, Vice Chair, Green Christian





Father Hudson's Caritas

Father Hudson's Caritas are celebrating 122 years of providing social care in the Archdiocese of Birmingham. The organisation is proud to have never stood still, changing and adapted as society and needs have changed. They have been known by various names over the years; formed in 1902 by Fr George Vincent Hudson as the 'Birmingham Diocesan Rescue Society for the protection of homeless and friendless Catholic children', becoming known as Father Hudson's Homes, in the 1980's registering as the charity Father Hudson's Society and in the 2010's being known as 'Father Hudson's Care'. Whilst the name has changed and the services have changed and developed away from children's residential care and adoption, the charity continues to ensure the ideals of Father Hudson and Catholic Social Teaching are core to their ethos and values; care for those who are marginalised and in need, with Freedom, Education and Aftercare remaining an important part of their services and projects.

On 1st October 2024 the charity changed their name to Father Hudson's Caritas under the values of being collaborative, inclusive and compassionate. This new brand is to clearly show the charities place regionally, nationally and internationally as a Caritas organisation. Working for, with and across the Archdiocese of Birmingham, spreading the Caritas mission.

Father Hudson's Caritas focuses their delivery across the 5 themes of older people, homelessness, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, children and families and disability. Services include St Josephs Care Home, St Catherine's Bungalows and day services for adults with complex disabilities, St Vincents and domiciliary care for adults with learning disabilities, Brushstrokes Community Project for refugees, Tabor Living providing accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, Fatima House for women in need of protection, Sophia House and Nicolas Barre House for refugees, Young at Heart for older people in North Staffordshire, New Routes Fostering and Family Support in Schools. They also provide support and HR/employment services for the independent charities, St Chad's Sanctuary, Hope Community and Maryvale Community Project.

As part of the new brand, the charity are having an increasing focus on reaching-out across the Diocese to encourage and support Catholic social action. Their new Caritas Development Lead, Emily Pugh, will be

visiting parishes, schools and other groups providing information and support.

Joanne Watters is new Chief Executive Officer of the charity. She has been in post since 1st June 2024 and prior to this Joanne was Head of Community Projects for 9 years, developing community projects, homelessness and refugee accommodation.

'I am proud as a Catholic to be the first female CEO for such an important and long-standing charity. I am committed to continuing the mission of our founder Fr George Vincent Hudson, working in partnership with the Archdiocese, parishes, schools and supporters.'

For further information about the history and work of Father Hudson's Caritas please visit www.fatherhudsons.org.uk



Prison ministry: a brief overview

On a recent visit to HMP Stafford, I offered mass for a member of the community who had died in the prison that morning. I heard someone's confession. I administered the sacrament of the sick to someone who had recently been discharged from hospital, and was waiting further tests for a potentially serious condition. I spent well over an hour with someone who has a terminally ill relative at home, under vast array of other problems too. My last ten minutes or so before leaving were spent in briefing a colleague and writing up my activities that day in the chaplaincy journal. It was a fairly typical afternoon- for that establishment: prisons differ greatly in character, depending, in part, upon the strategies of senior management, but also, of course, upon the type of people being held in custody and also the built environment.

Stafford specialises in sex offenders, many serving long sentences. It is, on the whole, a place with a cultured and talented population -- at least if Chapel attendance is a reliable index. Like all prisoners, the men at Stafford are themselves vulnerable. Like most prisoners, they can also be manipulative. Like more prisoners than you may imagine, they make for pleasant company much of the time -- and this is often a factor in their criminality. Like all of us, they experience the same problems and the same emotions, and they have the same physical, psychological and spiritual needs that are part of our human condition. In this country, in so far as I have experienced it, the prison system is geared to addressing these needs, and multidisciplinary teams work to advance welfare and to rehabilitate. The criminal justice system is not glamorous: it's not a vote winner to pour massive resource is into it -- despite the ultimate good that would doubtless be served in terms of future outcomes for reoffending. We work with the resources that are available to us and try to do our best for those we serve. Much of a chaplain's work is about making a necessary but unsatisfactory situation more bearable, and if possible beneficial for the prisoners, and supporting the staff that we also serve.

All chaplaincies are ecumenical and, indeed, interfaith. Effective working involves trust and cooperation between chaplains and other professionals of all faiths or none. Prison chaplaincy is not a suitable environment for those who think that their way is the only way. The need to see the point of view of colleagues of other traditions naturally trickles down to one's relationship with prisoners too, so is beneficial in an additional way. My own experience is that this mutuality and respect also flows out into ministry more generally, outside of the walls, fences and gates.

There is a pervasive culture of respect amongst staff in the prison service (not infrequently, prison officers are ex-military), and this generally extends to the relationship of staff with inmates, even though this is not always reciprocated. This culture is often particularly strong in the chaplaincy context. Prisoners, even the most troubled and troublesome, tend to be on their best behaviour in the Chapel. In seven years of working in prisons, I've never actually witnessed a serious incident in a prison Chapel, though that doesn't mean there haven't been any. The chaplaincy is a place of calm amidst the almost ceaseless noise of prison life, and also a place where people, both inmates and staff, usually feel able to be themselves and let down their guard a little. This is good for psychological and spiritual well-being, but also, ultimately for discipline, and for the effectiveness of the regime in helping people to change.

My work in chaplaincy in the Young People's Estate has brought me into contact with people who, almost without exception, come from difficult backgrounds. Those who have grown up in a family have usually experienced dysfunctionality and sometimes criminality in the close family circle, making anti-social and even criminal behaviour the norm. Others have grown up mostly in care -- or maybe I should write "in care". They have lacked positive role models for most or all of their short life. (The Youth Estate takes young people from 15 to 18 or so). A recognition that their life has not been easy is an important starting point in trying to help them. It may not justify their criminal behaviour, some of which is of the most serious kind, but it goes a long way to explaining it. Less easy to deal with is the casual way in which many young people regard their wrongdoing: seldom do they suggest that they are themselves victims of circumstance, as I just outlined; rather, they often wear their offending behaviour as a badge of honour. Admittedly, this can sometimes be amusing for chaplains and other staff as we are regaled with their anecdotes. But it was not amusing for victim's and is ultimately An unwelcome pathological sign.

It's in the nature of young men to be volatile, and to act first and think afterwards. Young offenders are especially prone to this, which makes sudden violent outbursts frequent. Violence is usually peer on peer, and many young people simply can't mix because of the risk of harm. This makes the logistics of ministry challenging. Staff, too, are sometimes attacked, though this rarely involves chaplains. The need to keep populations separate means that young people have to

spend longer periods locked in their cell. Meaningful pastoral visits are impossible in such circumstances. One has to speak at a narrow observation panel, often obscured by the young person from inside. There is usually ambient noise on the wing, making it difficult to hear; and sensitive conversations can hardly be held with the neighbours potentially listening.

Having documented some of the difficulties of prison ministry, I must end by speaking of its rewards. I already suggested that my own experience of prison chaplaincy has changed the way I relate to people in other areas of ministry, particularly enhancing my sense of empathy and my awareness of background events and experiences that colour people's behaviour. I've been fortunate to work with many inspirational people -- colleagues, both chaplains and other professionals, but inmates too. For me as a volunteer, opportunities for training have been very limited, so I've learned the craft from excellent mentors who have generously shared of their knowledge and experience. In the four establishments where I've worked, I've seen the important of good leadership at a senior level and gained an understanding of the significance of the physical environment for welfare and for enabling rehabilitation.

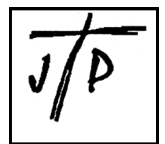
There is always something special about celebrating the Eucharist, as I did earlier today, with people serving long sentences for the most serious crimes -- today, as it happens, several congregants had been found guilty of murder. The Eucharist is manifest in prison as perhaps in no other context as the gathering of sinners around the altar of the Lamb who was sacrificed for us, and around the table at which all are invited by a loving Saviour to enjoy fellowship with one another and with Him. There is, I find, something very profound in this experience. Some of the most inspirational and devout celebrations at which I've presided have been in the confines of a prison Chapel.

I've had a lot of fun, and learned a great deal. Prison ministry isn't for everyone. My own experience of it, though, has enhanced my wider ministry as a priest. I'm very glad to have enjoyed the opportunity to serve in this way and hope to continue doing so into the future.

Fr Simon Stephens. October 2024.

If you have a contribution you would like included in the **February 2025** newsletter please send it by Email for consideration to:

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February 2025 Edition:
Last date for copy **31st January 2025**

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