



Autumn Assembly Report: October 2007

Seeking to renew the work of Justice & Peace in our Diocese

“Remember the past with gratitude, **Live** the present with enthusiasm, **Look** to the future with confidence” Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 2001, p 1

With these words, Pope John Paul II began his encyclical ‘*At the beginning of the New Millennium*’. And these words seemed just as relevant for our evaluation of three year’s of the new JPIC Commission structure. The morning would be given over to an evaluation of all that has happened since that first Assembly in November 2004 of the diocesan -wide structure which had been adopted after the Review process.

In his welcome and opening remarks, Archbishop Kevin reminded us that it was important to see the work of the JPIC Commission as linked with the Diocesan Vision. He went on to say that he was encouraged to find that in the responses to the initial Vision document many saw justice and peace as an integral part of the outreach of parishes and deaneries. He noted that the environment has moved up the JPIC agenda, as a concern for justice for future generations. But he acknowledged that much remains to be of concern in the field of justice, including war exacerbating suffering in so many places and for so many people. He concluded by thanking everyone for all that they have done and continue to do.

“Remember the past with gratitude”

Our facilitator for the morning, Fr John O’Toole, Director of the Christian education Centre, Tooting; reminded us that the morning was to be divided into three sections, the first being: ‘**Remember the past with gratitude**’.

Fr Michael introduced the first section with a Power Point presentation. Speaking briefly of the situation before 2004, he reminded people of the days when there were three areas each with their own J & P groups and their own chair and agenda.

In 2004 at the request of the Archbishop, the JPIC Office had begun a review with a consultation document sent out to as many people as could be reached. Based upon Pope John Paul’s document ‘*Bonus Pastor*’ it asked how we could bring its vision to life here in the diocese of Southwark.

One issue came up time and again in the replies - ‘we need to come together, to share our rich experiences, so that we can support and encourage each other.’

The result was the new Commission structure that is now in place - a diocesan wide Commission which welcomes everyone to the twice yearly meetings and enables discussing and sharing as well as trying to raise the awareness of the Gospels and Catholic Social Teaching upon which action for justice is based.

Michael ended with a look at some of the signs of Good News that have happened since then:

- an increase in the numbers coming to the JPIC meetings

- 130 parish contacts receiving regular news of campaigns and events
- 1,540 newsletter mailed out quarterly
- enquiries and the establishment of new or revived J & P groups in 12 parishes
- a change to an all inclusive name - JPIC

During the table discussion time that followed, people shared examples of good news that has occurred in the past three years. Some of the examples were shared with the whole group afterwards, including:

- Churches Together in Dulwich have an Interfaith project, ‘*Food for the Journey*’, which brings people of different faiths together. They bring foods from each culture to share when they meet.
- In Paddock Wood and Kingston the different churches are working together on J & P issues
- In Ham there is a good link with the Anglican Church and things are done together.
- Increased concern for outreach to migrant workers from eastern Europe.

(Continued on page 2)



Table discussions

(Continued from page 1)

- One person remarked that there is now more awareness of J & P issues at Sunday Mass but it isn't always followed through.
- The Medway Ports used to have few ships visiting. Now the number of lay people collaborating with priest visit 100 ships per month (over 1,000 seamen)

The next section of the morning was **'Live the present with enthusiasm'**

Sr Pat gave a brief presentation on the Commission today, the Assemblies held since 2004 and the present organisational structure. When the Commission meets at the Assemblies, it is a chance to become more aware of the Church's Social Teaching, time to tease out shared concerns and to work together on how best to respond to some of the pressing issues of our days. Membership is not restricted to a 'select few' but to many deanery representatives, clergy, agency representatives, religious and others who are living and working in the diocese.

So far there have been 6 Assemblies, held in Ashford once, Aylesford twice and the Amigo Hall, Lambeth three times. The topics and issues covered have been Making Poverty History - 3rd World Debt, Sustaining Creation, Past & Present forms of Slavery, Multicultural & Multifaith Southwark, and Livesimply. The present structure includes a Facilitating Group that meets to plan and organise these meetings composed of two representatives from South London, two from Kent, an Agency representative, and clergy. They meet with Fr Michael and Sr Pat. At this Assembly the group will retire and a new one will be needed.

To end the presentation, people were asked to take time at their tables to talk over what they had seen and to respond on sheets of paper to the following questions:

- ⇒ What do you think is the perception of J & P today?
- ⇒ What are the current issues to be faced?



⇒ What/where are the gaps?

When the sheets were put up around the hall it was interesting to see the areas of overlap from the discussions. With regards to the *perception of J & P*, it was felt that:

- As an organisation it was seen for older people but as a movement there are many more aware of justice issues including younger people, and much more questioning of injustices
- The work of J& P is appreciated by the agencies, and in Southwark it is helped by holding these Assemblies
- J & P is seen as very broad, where lots of issues are important
- There is also a wrong perception that J & P is too 'political' and secular, which forgets social teaching of the Church and the spirituality of social justice
- For some it would appear that there is still confusion about the focus and priorities of J & P

Looking at the *current issues to be faced* - which could provide the basis for future Assemblies, there was much repetition. Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Ecology & the Environment, Trafficking, Fairtrade, Interfaith, Housing, Migration, and addressing materialism - livesimply, were all highlighted. Other different issues flagged

up included ignorance of the Social teaching of the Church, grounding in Spirituality, formation for all including the young, and the Guns, Knives & gangs culture amongst the young.

The final question - *What/where are the gaps* - saw some people asking for more participation from clergy. Others wanted more parishes to be involved, although it was also stated that many people do not recognise what they are already doing is J& P work. If there were more awareness of social teaching this might increase that recognition. Another group felt more training could be offered to clergy to enable their preaching for J & P. The same group felt the twice yearly Assemblies were not enough to offer support. One group stated that there was a need for more involvement with schools, whilst another thought that the gaps in perception could be eased if there were better publicity of events and meetings.

The final part of the morning had the heading **'Look to the future with confidence'**.

Fr John O'Toole led this session. Confidence, he said, was faith and trust in God, having thanks for what had gone before and being ready to move on. The document from which the phrase had come, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, had been written in 2001, and linked faith to life and life to faith. Our Church Social Teaching was still very much a secret to many. He drew attention to three other words:

- Dialogue - listening with the ear of the heart (St Benedict) and sometimes to what is not said

"It is a way of making sure that those doing the work on the ground have a chance to meet up with one another, to make their voices heard and a chance to keep abreast of the key concerns in the Diocese (of Southwark) as a whole." Review Document

- Discernment - learning, separating, distinguishing what are the signs of the Spirit at work in our world.
- Decision - lopping, cutting away/pruning and deciding on what to do. This can be painful but is necessary.

So, what is emerging here today? John thanked everyone for their clear discernment and work on the response papers. As we look at them, we need to continue that dialogue, to reflect upon what is emerging and what needs to be done. The Church must be a part of the world, not apart from the world.

And all must be done, he said, in the light of the Vision for the Diocese Consultation which is underway at the moment. Southwark is at a time of transition and change, the outcomes of the Vision process will have implications for us all.

Perhaps it will see agencies working more closely together - as we "start to become friends who look in the same direction" (C S Lewis) JPIC will be affected as part of the

Deans. Our work today may well have an influence on those meetings. We are still at the discerning stage of the Vision process, trying to learn, to see where the Spirit is speaking to us. Our structures for the future must serve our Mission. And in order for that to happen we need to be clear on what that Mission is. Our life as Church requires 5 aspects that must balance -

- Stewardship
- Worship
- Evangelisation
- Education (of all)
- Pastoral Care

John then invited people to look at the way forward. Where do we go from here? What might it need? What might it do? What is the place of the Facilitation Group, how should it work?

After a time in discussion at tables, the meeting was opened up for a plenary session.

One area raised was the relevance and understanding of the present parish/deanery boundaries.

and find out what was happening, see what is going on and encourage the sharing of good practice. This 'over-view' could help seed other parishes. The group needs to assist the Chair and Coordinator and could become a real support to them.

More networking with other agencies was suggested, such as working more with the Youth Service, Schools' Commission, and the Christian Education Centre.

On the question of future topics, the

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one which stood out for many people was that of the Guns and Knives culture of the young at present. So far in London more than 20 young people have been killed this year.

Other topics that were offered as future topics were Migration, Creation and the Environment, and Poverty in the UK.

The morning session came to an end. On behalf of those who had organised the morning, John thanked everyone for participating and sharing so much. It is hoped that these responses would form part of the ongoing conversation with the Archbishop as part of the Vision process and some could be taken up by the new Facilitating group when appointed.

Lunch was served by the UCM (Union of Catholic Mothers) who once again gave up their time to prepare the tea, coffee, soup and other items given so generously by Fr Michael's parish of St Peter's, Woolwich. Certainly it was appreciated by everyone. There was time to visit the stalls set up by a number of agencies - Jesuit Refugee Service, Apostleship of the Sea, Pax Christi, Christian Ecology Link, CAFOD Southwark, Progressio, Housing Justice and the JPIC Office.

The afternoon saw a shift in focus. David Jackson has been the Interfaith Coordinator for the Diocese of Leeds since 2000. He is involved in trying to work at the issue of interfaith relations in the Leeds and Bradford areas. Prior to that he had for a while been the Coordinator of the secular Interfaith Education Centre in Bradford.

David's brief had been to help us identify the practical things that we



process. In the response Summary it was noted that JPIC could be a model for other groups as many already work across parishes, and indeed across faiths. Such witness can be more important than words and is a way of sharing good practice. Perhaps the Deanery Pastoral Councils should/could have J & P representatives on them?

The next stage will be the meeting with the Archbishop of the heads of the diocesan agencies to reflect upon the responses received from laity and then his meeting with the

It was felt that for most people the deanery structure had little impact. Few could name their deaneries. Work on strengthening and working more in deaneries could be helpful.

It was also felt that the new facilitation group would be better served by having more representatives from the three areas of the diocese, so it was agreed to have 2 from Kent, and 2 each from South East and South West London - provided they could be found.

One suggestion was that this group should do an audit of the diocese

(Continued from page 3)

can do to offer friendship to other faiths - by sharing with us some of the things which worked up in Leeds and Bradford. He did this through showing us some of the experiences and activities that happen and telling us the stories of some of the people with whom he lives and works.

He began by quoting Pope Benedict XVI: "Love is indeed ecstasy, as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of

"Interfaith relations are not simply an incentive from the Gospel, but are for our very health - and in a way that is different from that in the south of the UK." David

the closed inward looking self towards its liberation and indeed, the discovery of God."

Our journey towards other faiths was like that, he said. The journey can be hard/difficult, but when we see God in the Muslim, the Sikh, the more we see God. Each has a different perspective but all give a vision of God. In the same document that we had used during the morning - *Novo Millennio Inuente* - are the three facets of why we are Christians:

- » *Worship* - contemplate the face of Christ
- » *Communio* - build a loving community
- » *Mission* - loving service of ALL that is, building up the Kingdom

Catholics, he said, have not been very good at the last one. We need to search for a spirituality and theology of interfaith. We need to start with Scripture and read from the perspective of "What does this say about dialogue?" In the Old Testament we read of God's dialogue with Israel and the universal call to divine/human dialogue. (See Psalm 67) In the Gospels, for Jesus, saving faith is operative among 'others' - the Kingdom is accessible to them - here and now (See Acts 10) From here we can move on to the Church's Social Teaching, especially *Nostra Aetate* the Vatican II document. Pope John Paul II wrote "*Inter-religious dialogue is part of the Church's evangelising mission.*" (Redemptoris Missio)

But, David warned, it is important to be equipped for this work - we need to be well grounded and formed in spirituality and in prayer (a dialogue of love). "*In your mind you must be the same as Jesus Christ*" - this ref-



erence to the kenosis of the Son of God serves to remind us that Dialogue is not always easy or without suffering.

However, it can be joyful, and something to celebrate. It depends on our individual relations with people.

For most people, their experience with other faiths will be as part of the dialogue of life - sharing the joys, sorrows, problems and preoccupations of those we meet, maybe as neighbours, work colleagues etc. For others it will be through the dialogue of action - working together for a common good, for human rights etc; whilst for others it will be through the dialogue of religious experience - going on Interfaith Walks, Celebrating Holocaust Memorial Day etc. And for a small few, with sound formation in their own faith, it will be through the dialogue of theology.

David interspersed his presentation with pictures of the different events that he has been a part of in Leeds and Bradford over the years. These included Interfaith Walks and times of prayer for Peace, many multicultural Events and celebrations ("*don't forget to celebrate and be joyful!*"), visits to different places of worship - mosques, temples, synagogues etc. In Bradford there is a Columban ecumenical Community. Finally David had a few words for getting started. Don't be afraid to visit places of worship, he said, But if you don't feel confident to do so on your own, then join your local

Interfaith Group. You can contact SA-CRE (Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education) to find out what's going on or the Local Authority Councils. Support local schools in inviting members of other faiths in to talk to pupils. He suggested clergy need to get to know other faith leaders - invite them for tea, spend some time in prayerful presence with them and use worship and parish formation (i.e. sermons) to encourage the laity to get involved.

Part of our identity as Catholics, he concluded, was to be engaged in Interfaith dialogue whose aim is to serve humanity. But in reality it still remains an 'add-on' to catechesis, to adult formation, because it is insufficiently nurtured from worship or living 'communio'.

Fr Michael ended the day by thanking David on our behalf for his excellent presentation which had given us food for thought and practical ideas. He thanked everyone for coming to the Assembly. The next day will be on **April 19th 2008** at **Aylesford**. The theme will be decided in the next few weeks.

Prayer for the gift of dialogue

God our Father, from the dawn of creation you began your dialogue of love and so go before us in all our ways. Breathe into us your Spirit so that we may share in creation's care.

Your covenants of old created a people to be a witness of your guiding hand among all the peoples.

From Israel came your Son, the Word, who lived, died and rose again, reconciling all humanity and all creation to yourself. As the Body of your Son, we seek to enter into dialogue with those of other religions for the peace and justice of all humanity and the preservation of your creation. Help us to find in that dialogue rays of your truth and seeds of your Word, so that both we and those of other faiths we meet may come ever closer to you, our destiny and final rest.

We ask for this in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.