



# ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK

## **JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION COMMISSION**

### **2015 SPRING ASSEMBLY**

## **“From prayer to action and back again - learning and doing together”**

Our 2015 Spring Assembly was held in the New Barn, Aylesford Priory and was a day for discussion, dreaming and discernment, exploring social justice issues through the eyes of faith.

The day started with our usual table talk bringing together people from different parishes and communities to discuss matters of interest to them.

The feedback, facilitated by Rosa Shea, brought out some interesting discussion points. Some deanery J&P groups are particularly active, Bexleyheath was specifically mentioned, and the Bruderhof Community have a live mission in Justice and Peace. However some parish groups are struggling and it was felt, by more than one table, that more support is really needed from parish priests who may not always be the strongest supporters.

Parishes could also do more in areas such as using sustainable energy in heating systems.

There was a feeling that we needed to get the youth more involved, post-confirmation J&P groups were mentioned.

At a wider level it was noted that the CAFOD Climate Change campaign is getting a great deal of support.

James Trewby (Columban Justice and Peace Education) then led us into the main activity of the day, based upon ‘See, Judge, Act’. We first moved to a circle of chairs where a selection of newspapers and magazines had been laid out. Participants were then invited to tear out and place in the centre any items which they thought were relevant to the day.

People then suggested topics to take forward. From the 14 suggested this was whittled down to 6 by a show of hands:

- Concern for the elderly and pensioners
- Housing and Homelessness issues
- Education issues
- Economics
- Our relationship with our priests
- Migration issues

Small groups, supported by facilitators (Kyra Trewby, Rosa Shea, Daniel Hale, Barbara Wilson, Louise Zanre and Kenneth Roberts), then explored their issue, eventually deciding upon an action.



The first session for the groups was to get to know each other by introducing themselves (name, parish and reason for coming today) and discussing, in pairs, their reason for choosing their particular issue.



The day included a number of 5 minute “Inspiring Inputs”. The first was by Daniel Hale who gave a presentation on his visit to the USA Mexico border. He mentioned a number of inspiring individuals, Carlos who runs a centre for migrant labourers, inspired by Cesar Chavez, helping them find work and affordable food. Sr Betty raising awareness of the damaging impact of USA foreign policy on Latin America. Molly, a librarian, collects information about violent deaths, vital for human rights activists and Fr Bob, an inspiring Columban missionary priest.

For Session 2 the groups explored their chosen issue. This included considering what they already knew, causes and consequences, what faith has to say about it and where and how they might focus an action.

The second inspiring speaker was Barbara Wilson from Citizens UK. Citizens UK brings together churches, schools, synagogues and mosques working together and talking together to address issues at both local and national level. One great success has been raising the matter of the Living Wage Campaign and Barbara was able to tell us that Lambeth Council, as well as several other councils, have agreed to pay all staff and contractors at least this level. Citizens aim to work together to develop leaders, influence politicians and make positive changes in our communities.



After lunch our third inspiring input was from Michael McLoughlin, who gave us some of the history of J&P in the diocese, starting with work on Racial Awareness, Southern Rhodesia and diocesan investment in the arms trade. He also mentioned structures: there are now ongoing discussions about setting up a London J&P group and revising the diocesan J&P structure.



Session 3 asked the groups to move towards their actions - “What will we do?” and these were concluded in session 4 which decided on the presenter and content to be given to the whole meeting.

Between these two we had our final inspiring input from Tom Quinton, a member of the Bruderhof Community. He is presently based at Nonnington in East Kent. Tom told us of a Bruderhof initiative to bring grandparents into schools to share their life experiences with their pupils. It was felt that this could counter concerns that Christian education values are not being transmitted through the schools or the media.



After sharing feedback on how people found the day we moved to the reports on the actions agreed by each group:

### **From the group discussing relationships with our parish priests:**

Begin with the ‘personal approach’ – if encountering difficulties, try to define the issues differently, as ‘Justice and Peace’ can sometimes be seen as left-wing and radical. Begin with ‘church supported’ issues e.g. CAFOD, Pax Christi, JRS – brief the priest (gently) about the issue and your ideas for promoting it. Offer activities AND offer to do ALL the organisation.

Use existing parish groups and offer input to your PP– e.g. RCIA has one module of Social Justice, also part of Confirmation preparation – offer help with youth group (consider using ‘Training for Transformation’ or YCW programmes) - offer talks to UCM /CWL (e.g. may be particularly interested in CAFOD / Jesuit Refugee Service work on refugees). SVP have great resource “Mini-Vinnies – for 7-11 yr olds.

Use parish ‘get-togethers’ to raise issues – e.g. stall at fete, possibly with card-signing for a campaign – parish meetings: have a table exercise to discuss an issue e.g. needs in the community and how local parishes can contribute, with a plenary and suggestions for action.

Liturgies – offer these for different occasions: current events in the news, e.g. vigil for Nepal earthquake victims; CAFOD Lent and Harvest Fast Days; Pax Christi Lenten actions; persecuted Christians in Middle East. Offer the PP a different theme and liturgy for each week in Lent and Advent. There are loads of resources from different organisations (Aid to the Church in Need was mentioned) – including prayers, display material – use more traditional liturgies and resources to raise less traditional issues.

Guest speakers - ask PP if you can invite outside speakers for events, even to lead reflections, day retreats etc – usually very inspiring and offering ideas for concrete actions on issues.

Deaneries – deanery meetings usually have outside speakers – offer a presentation on an issue that parishes might like to become involved with, or arrange a speaker from e.g. CAFOD, JRS, Pax Christi etc. Possibly form links with other J&P groups across the deanery. Greenwich Deanery has had recent input on training and is about to investigate social justice issues.

Ecumenical J&P groups – depending on the area these can often be very vibrant - e.g. URC 'Church Mission in the World and Society' – your own group could link with other churches, also linking in the whole parish.

### **From the group concerned with Education issues:**

What contemporary challenges do our young people face?

- It was felt that the education system focuses on utility rather than uniqueness
- Teachers are up against increasing bureaucratic pressures
- Parents are under economic pressure - often juggling multiple jobs
- Children often struggle to learn English in multilingual neighbourhoods
- Children can be developmentally delayed through overuse of technology
- A sense of solidarity is threatened by social segmentation

What does this mean for our young people?

They can struggle to grow up with Gospel values, social skills, valuing people in society, and leaves them with a weakened basis for action. In this vacuum, they are vulnerable to outside influence from media, the market etc. Education is about drawing out what's in the child, their intrinsic value.

How do we do this in today's society?

Children need support in growing up to be the people God had in mind for them. Parents need support in that as they are very busy. The media puts a lot of pressure on young people and parents today.

Who has the time, experience and interest to engage our young people?

To act as a counterbalance to this, and promote kingdom values, harnessing the energy that exists in our local community we suggest greater use of the wisdom and experience of older people.

We call on the J&P Commission to consider the idea of using older people in our communities - our schools and parishes - to connect with our young people. We suggest two steps:

- To audit the kinds of intergenerational learning projects that are already out there and try to promote these to the Catholic community in the diocese.
- To reflect on best practice in these projects and initiate a pilot project that can be adopted by parishes and schools in the diocese that don't already do something.

### **From the group discussing migration issues:**

It was agreed that we should actively promote the Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme, which is the UK Governments response to the UNHCR's request for help with the Syrian Refugee Crisis, and request J& P members to write to their local Councils asking them to accommodate at least 10 families or 50 persons under the scheme.

Members are also asked to contact their local MP and MEPs asking them to expedite the process. Even though the UK government has agreed to help actual progress has been slow.

### **From the group discussing pensioners and carers for the elderly:**

It was agreed to write to all deanery pastoral councils with copies to parish priests asking them to review the existing help given through pastoral work and stressing the need for more to be done.



**From the group concerned with Housing and Homelessness:**

**Proposed notice for parish newsletters:**

***Treating homeless people as human beings!***

*When did you last say Hello to a homeless person on the street? Why not stop, ask his or her name, share a hot drink and have a conversation? Yes buy the Big Issue but also ask the vendor's name, invite them to come and have a sandwich and start to build a relationship?*

It was agreed by the whole meeting to send the following letter to Archbishop Peter:

*"Dear Archbishop Peter,*

***Releasing surplus land and redundant buildings for use as housing***

*We are writing on behalf of the Southwark Justice and Peace Assembly which met on 25 April.*

*Among other topics which were discussed was the growing need for affordable housing, particularly in London.*

*We as a group are aware that there are redundant Church buildings, such as the old friary in Friary Road, Peckham, which could be demolished and affordable new-build properties erected for the use of young families; possibly through a community self-build scheme.*

*We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you and look forward to hearing from you via Terry Brown the J&P co-ordinator".*

**From the group concerned with Economic issues:**

it was also agreed to send a letter to Archbishop Peter regarding the Living Wage Campaign and the whole meeting agreed to sign:

*Dear Archbishop Peter,*

***Living wage: justice and dignity for all***

*We are writing on behalf of the Southwark Justice and Peace Assembly which met on 25 April.*

*Among other topics we discussed the growing inequality in Britain and ways in which it might be alleviated. One relevant action is the payment of the Living Wage to all employees both direct and also those paid on outsourced contracts. To remind you the London Living wage is £9.15 per hour and outside London it is £7.85.*

*We understand that in a statement in November 2012, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales have advocated the payment of the Living Wage in all Catholic organisations and charities including schools and all staff paid through contracts. We would like to know how far this is being achieved in the Southwark diocese.*

*We would hope it is already the case that all our organisations comply with the bishops' guidance but we would be grateful if you could confirm this to be so.*

*We would also be interested to know how many people are paid on zero hours contracts and look forward to hearing from you via Terry Brown the J&P co-ordinator.*

The Archbishop has sent a positive reply to this letter conforming the diocese support the principle of the Living Wage for all diocesan and parish employees. All employees of the Diocese Curia receive at least the Living Wage and parishes which employ lay people are encouraged to do likewise. A copy of the full letter is on the Southwark JPIC website.

From the feedback, with just one dissenting voice the See, Judge, Act format of the meeting was considered to have been a great success and particular thanks must go to James Trewby who was the main facilitator and whose ideas inspired the day.