

NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin January 2025

The e-bulletin for the North West, linked to the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), is produced jointly within the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Please send articles and diary dates to anneoc980@hotmail.com

DREAMERS AND THINKERS

To start off the New Year we're shining a spotlight on recent reflections from some of the dreamers and thinkers who feature regularly in these bulletins to challenge and inspire us: Rev'd Jon Swales, David Gee, Jenny Sinclair, Jon Kuhrt and Ian Linden.

Rev'd Jon Swales: Returning to Theology

I've got a hunch, maybe even a dream, that we as church leaders need to keep on returning to theology—not just the kind that fills books, but the kind that lives and breathes in the world. It's about getting back to thinking theologically, where the heart of the Christian faith meets the messy realities of the world we live in.

As Karl Barth once said, we need the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. We've got to bring scripture and tradition into dialogue with what's happening around us—engage with the real issues people are facing today.

At the centre of this is Jesus Christ, the one who stood with the marginalized and took on the systems of power. Theology that's grounded in Jesus isn't content with "business as usual." It's got to stir things up, challenge the comfortable, and disrupt the status quo. This is prophetic theology—the kind that speaks truth in a world that often doesn't want to hear it. It cuts through denial and addresses the realities of injustice and oppression head-on.

But I don't just dream of a theology that talks about change. It's got to lead to action. Theology aligned with God's kingdom doesn't sit on a shelf or stay in a sermon. It's lived out. It's a theology that brings hope to those in despair and justice where there's oppression. It's not afraid to get messy and step into the hard places. It's a theology in service of liberation, one that refuses to rest while the vulnerable continue to suffer. It listens to the cries of the poor and oppressed and responds with action, not just words, rooted in the radical love and mission of Jesus.

This is the theology I dream of—born from love, in love, and for love. A theology that's alive, prophetic, and liberating. One that demands transformation—in our hearts, in our communities, and in the systems around us. It's time we return to that kind of theology, where we refuse to let injustice and despair have the final word. A theology driven by the countercultural, revolutionary love of Christ.

• **Rev'd Jon Swales** founded *Lighthouse West Yorkshire* in 2014 (see the article below). Alongside this, Jon is involved in theological education and is currently a tutor with Leeds School of Theology, St Hild and Niagara School of Missional Leadership. He is passionate about peace-making & climate justice and seeks through prayer and activism to be a prophetic witness to the church. Jon has put together a prayer book and podcast called '**Lament and Hope: Prayers for the Climate and Ecological Emergency**' www.cruciformjustice.com

Rev'd Jon Swales: Ten Years of Lighthouse – A Reflection

December 3, 2024: Jesus is often depicted as a sanitized, safe figure—his radical message diluted by centuries of tradition. This version of Jesus seems to bless the powerful, overlook societal excesses, and comfortably fit within our cultural and religious norms, making little impact on our daily lives.

Yet beneath these layers lies the wild Messiah—a transformative figure who embodies a Kingdom that radically overturns conventional expectations. This Jesus is not content with the status quo. He flips tables in the temple, dines with outcasts, confronts the rich, and champions the poor. His Kingdom stands in stark contrast to the empires of his time and ours, revealing a love so fierce that it led him to sacrifice his life for both friend and foe. This wild Messiah is deeply biased towards the marginalized, offering a radical welcome to those who are often cast aside by society.

This Kingdom of compassion and inclusion challenges both secular and sacred systems. It is a place where the last are first, and where every soul, regardless of their past or present struggles, is embraced with an unconditional love. This profound and unyielding compassion is not merely a teaching but a way of life that Jesus lived out daily.

I vividly recall the moment when this wild Messiah's call reached me. Picture a young man sitting outside, a pipe in hand—not a crack pipe, just tobacco. Amid the swirl of smoke and the quiet of the backyard, I prayed. To my surprise, I heard a voice—not audible, but unmistakably clear: "Jon, go and be a servant of the church." I took this as the voice of Jesus, the wild Messiah, calling me into a missional and ecclesial adventure.

This wasn't just a nudge; it was a wake-up call that redirected my life. It led me to study for ordained ministry in the Church of England and pursue a research degree in Biblical Studies. After four years, I returned to Leeds to begin my curacy at St. George's Church. But it was a simple, heartfelt prayer that set the stage for what was to come: "Lord, bring across my path those who have been smashed up by life, and help me to love them with the love of Jesus."

In the following months, this prayer was answered in countless ways. Whether at the library, on the streets, or even during a family holiday, I encountered those in deep distress and felt compelled by love to offer hope and share the good news of Jesus. Lives were transformed, including my own. There is no darkness so dark that the love of Christ cannot shine.

At that time, several vulnerable adults with complex needs began attending St. George's Church—a large city centre resource church primarily catering to middle-class individuals and students. I remember a sermon where the preacher casually mentioned, "When I was golfing in Spain." These words resonated with those who golf, have been to Spain, or are planning a holiday. Such language, culturally encoded, draws in a particular demographic. While there's nothing inherently wrong with this—it's how language and culture work—these words can also alienate those who don't share that culture, making them feel like outsiders.

Another instance comes to mind: we had set up for an Alpha introductory evening, complete with jazz musicians, low lighting, fancy food, tablecloths and tealights. It was a beautifully arranged event, designed to appeal to the middle class. Yet, a member of the street community walked in, took one look around, and said, "This isn't for me—it's too posh." And he was right. While the team was welcoming, the cultural encoding of the evening unintentionally excluded those on the margins.

Cultural encoding goes beyond tablecloths or golfing stories; it encompasses language, assumed literacy, music styles, ways of praying, and levels of interaction. It made me question: What does church and Christian community look like when designed for adults with multiple and complex needs?

This question planted the seed for Lighthouse—a church plant and fresh expression of church embedded within St. George's Church, designed to be culturally encoded, welcoming, and relevant for vulnerable adults. A small team, including the newly appointed Crypt Chaplain, approached the CEO of St. George's Crypt with our vision in 2013. After hearing our plans, he said, "Go for it. We've been praying for this for ten years." And so we did, serving soup, offering kindness, and proclaiming the love and light of Jesus every Sunday.

This year, we celebrate a decade of Lighthouse, a Leeds-based community committed to offering hope and light to those battered and bruised by the storms of life. It's a church for those struggling with homelessness, mental health issues, addiction—a community for those who feel pushed to the margins of society. Lighthouse stands as a testament to collective effort—paid staff, dedicated volunteers, and supporters who contribute through prayer and financial donations. We are thankful for our partnerships across the city, including the Diocese of Leeds, St. George's Crypt, St. George's Church, Leeds City Mission, Unity in Poverty Action, and Horsforth Shed. Thank you.

Lighthouse is not a mainstream church. It is a sanctuary for the lost, the broken, and the marginalized—a place where the wild Messiah's message of radical love and acceptance is embodied and lived out. We provide Christian worship, compassionate pastoral care, authentic community, and day centre provision—a safe space where all can move towards lives of dignity, meaning, and purpose. We welcome 80-100 people each Sunday, and about 150 individuals consider Lighthouse their church. Love transforms lives, and hope walks among us—the presence of the wild messiah and compassionate kingdom is tangible.

As I reflect on these ten years, I am both humbled and awed by the realization of my calling. I'm a wounded healer, a sinner saved by grace, a beggar directing others to where they can find bread. I am continually amazed by the transformation that has occurred—not through my own doing, but through the relentless, radical love of Jesus. The hero of this story is and always will be Jesus, the wild Messiah and God-Man. He leads us, heals us, and inspires us to extend his love to others.

Rev'd Jon Swales, 2024 www.lighthousewestyorkshire.org.uk

David Gee: Four Flashes of Light — I. Devoted

November 24, 2024: It's mid-afternoon on US election day and the BBC have gone to a small town in Georgia, as far as I remember, looking for passers-by to speak a word on their vote. Or maybe it's Ohio, Wisconsin. We're in a little public park squared with quiet residential streets somewhere near the middle of town. The first November leaves are beginning to drape the ground in gentle colours. It's that moment of the turning season when some have their coats on while others hold out a few days more.

The vox-pops come thick and fast and I'm plunged into an impressionistic haze of America. Three distinct impressions, to be precise, which emerge from the varying attitudes of the passers-by. In one, loose group are the fair few folks who sort of shrug, as if the election has landed them with an awkward extra chore when they're already a bit busy with other stuff. They reel off how they voted as if they'd just picked whichever main looked tastiest from a restaurant menu, or least unpalatable. They tend to be well made up: smart, a bit bored, insular, haven't thought about it a lot, and then they're on their way. Their apparent indifference to the common future of their society, honest though it is, is unsettling to watch.

A second, smaller group tend to be a bit younger, dressed-down, and palpably alarmed at what might be about to happen to their country. They have friends, they tell the camera, that a Trump presidency would push under as the services they rely on are cut. They know immigrants who Trump calls 'mental asylum people' who would be deported. They've been thinking and worrying for people outside their own immediate circle because, it seems, this is how they think political decisions should be made. Their passion rocks me. It's refreshing, hopeful, though borders on desperate. I find myself feeling for them, glad of their leaven in the American dough, and want to encourage them to keep caring.

A third impression, and this is the one I most want to carry with me, comes from a brief interview with a working mum. She's sat on the park bench with downturned mouth, holding two or three strawberry-blond tween-age kids. Her arm wraps around her older son as she chats, rubbing his forehead gently with her thumb, while he, camera-shy, stares at the ground. The autumn breeze lifts his locks a little. The woman declares in a slow, southern drawl that she's voted Trump. Asked why, she shrugs. 'A little more money in the pocket will help some,' she says, expecting tax cuts. 'Buy the kids some new shoes. It helped a bit last time. Maybe it'll be a bit more this time.' She doesn't sound sure, but it's the bet she's made. As I listen, I imagine her life feels full enough already with more important things than her vote, but she's clear about why she cast it the way she did. It was for her children.

I can't know this woman's life, but the impression she leaves is of quietly knowing exactly what counts in it – her family – and what she needs to care for them – a bit more money in the pocket. I don't imagine this hard-worked mum speaking up for the stranger in her midst. I don't imagine either that she doesn't care about them. I guess only that, for a long time, care beyond her own family has often felt beyond reach, unaffordable. And yet her love seems clear, non-negotiable, with no political pretention beyond itself. She shrugs again, as if all that need be said be said. Four years down the line and I wonder if the bench the mother sits on will still be there, after Trump's ten-pound hammer crushes the budget for parks and rec. But not a bone in my body wants to argue with her. I hope against hope that she and her children get what they need from a Trump presidency. Maybe they will.

A moment comes back to me from Kamala Harris' gracious, and no doubt personally painful, concession speech on the steps of Howard University the following day. She holds her arms in front of her with a warm smile, as far as I remember, and appeals to America gaze into the lines of a stranger's face and see your neighbour there. To my ear, those words speak to the essence of a shared future worthy of the word. But the breezy ease with which they're so often said, as if what they point to is obviously right and easy – a presumption of which I too have many times been guilty – must madden the mum I've just met on the park bench.

To love the stranger as one's neighbour is hard. It might get easier for those of us who've wrested ourselves free of the grind, usually by dint of some privilege, and now enjoy the existential elbow room to ponder the future as an equitable hope, something to hold in common. But I doubt it ever stops being hard if you're pounding the breadline daily. The presumption that it ought to be otherwise – not that we can care for our neighbour, but that we all, obviously ought to – seems to have alienated so many marginalised Americans as to leave the Democrats high and dry on election night. And I'm left telling myself what I should already know: don't make the mum on the bench stupid, don't make her the sort who 'don't look up'. It's a terrible mistake, all the worse for being a righteous mistake – of which I for one will now always hope to repent.

<https://hopeswork.org/2024/11/24/four-flashes-of-light/>

• **David Gee** is an activist and writer with a special interest in the meaning of hope in the face of global crises. You can order David's book **Hope's Work** here: <https://hopeswork.org/book/> – highly recommended.

Jenny Sinclair: Through the Holy Spirit, God is with us where we are

Christmas 2024 and New Year 2025 edition of the T4CG Newsletter: Reflecting on the reality of God, I am thinking about a conversation on our Leaving Egypt podcast with Harvey Kwiyani, a Malawian missionary working among Christian communities here in the UK. We were discussing the impact of modernity on how people perceive God.¹ Harvey's home culture has not yet succumbed to neoliberalism and individualism, and for his community still, the Spirit of God is real. They live with the expectation that God is at work among them, all the time. Harvey says "their interpersonal relations are grounded in the belief that they are serving the Spirit as they serve one another." By contrast in the UK, he is meeting "many people who say they follow Christ, live as if God does not exist. What we are seeing is a functional atheism."

Our culture has lost its way, and the hunger for meaning is drawing some prominent atheists to explore Christianity. The attraction for some of them is what they perceive of as its role in the defence of Western culture. This is understandable and the loss is real. But Jesus tells us not to be afraid. We are invited to be constructive not defensive, and to restore trust in the reality of the divine nature of Creation. We are called to join in with God's great participation, with what the Holy Spirit is doing among us in the here and now, in the places where we live and work. This is not a naive or woolly position. Rather, the incarnational story calls us to a covenantal way of living bounded by the commandments, primarily to love God and neighbour. We are called into a story that is both traditional and radical.

The cultural malaise we are in is caused by an operating philosophy that, as John Gray has said, "is exhausted". He describes it as "a certain kind of neoliberal progressivism, unfitted to the conditions of the world in which we live." It was based on a false anthropology that assumes human beings can flourish as transacting individuals, and its system of globalisation is geared to prioritise the interests of finance capital. Such a worldview comes from the mistaken assumption that God, place, tradition and relationships are unimportant. This is why we are seeing this widespread unravelling and why we see such human distress.

Amidst all the brokenness, we must live with the expectation that God is at work. Anchored in daily practices of prayer, we can look out for the movements of the Spirit in the mundane, in conversations at the bus stop, in the taxi, in the local shop. Moments of mutual acknowledgement, acts of loving kindness, intentional acts of listening, making eye contact, putting down the smartphone - all these can develop into a shared strength capable of resisting what is dehumanising, and foster a confidence to build further human connection.

Made in the image of God, we are relational beings and by making space to listen to each other and to the Spirit, new forms of local association will emerge. These forms are the beginnings of a constructive alternative to the neoliberal and totalitarian tendencies that have become so dominant.

Grassroots collaborations, whether around local food production and supply, mutual aid, sport, care of the vulnerable, energy, land or housing - there are many forms of local and moral economy - will generate common good spaces which make "provision for each person to have a hand in shaping and benefiting from the material and social conditions under which they live and work." This is how Luke Bretherton describes the Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain's vision of Christian humanism. Maritain saw these local democratic forms of association "as a vital means through which humans can realise their true natures as those created in the image of God."

Each of us is called to join in with this positive energy, becoming attuned to where the Holy Spirit is active in our neighbourhood, joining in and seeing what happens. Church communities have a vital role to play as constructive partners, no matter how vulnerable they may feel. Crucially it must start, not with our own plans, but by discerning what the Spirit is already doing. We need to recognise that God is not abstract, but really and truly among us.

¹ **Podcast Leaving Egypt and Harvey Kwiyani** May 14, 2024 – LISTEN HERE:

<https://leavingegyptpodcast.substack.com/p/ep20-with-harvey-kwiyani>

• **Jenny Sinclair, Founder Director, Together for the Common Good (T4CG)**

• *T4CG is dedicated to spiritual and civic renewal in a time of deep change and instability. Drawing from across the Christian traditions and in particular from Catholic Social Teaching our work encourages people to fulfil their vocation for the common good. Always working in partnership, we do this through thought leadership, navigating the signs of the times, producing resources, accompanying leaders, and in grounded work with local churches and schools. We are non partisan, independent, ecumenical and proud of our Christian traditions.*

<https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/>

Jon Kuhrt: Cutting through the fog of untruth

October 27, 2024: On Monday night I spoke at the AGM of the brilliant Bristol homeless charity *inHope* <https://www.inhope.uk/> which run a Hope into Action franchise in the city.¹ Later I had to get a train up to Nottingham and my journey included an hours' wait at Birmingham New Street Station between 10pm and 11pm. Large train stations are never short of a bit of drama, especially late at night. And as I was waiting, I was aware of some raised voices and agitation in the *Pret-a-Manger* café just behind me. I saw a man leaving the shop after clearly causing some issue to the staff.

I was standing quite nearby and the man immediately started talking to me. He looked weary and resigned and clearly under the influence of alcohol. But he was coherent and he asked me if we could talk. I said that I had plenty of time on my hands and was happy to. We exchanged names and quite quickly he opened up about his life: the addictions he was caught in and his spiral of regrets, broken relationships, lost opportunities and bad decisions. He talked about the harsh upbringing he experienced but how he now had a young son who he hardly saw and how life was repeating itself. It was the kind of story I have heard far too many times. As he was speaking he opened his jacket, took a boxed *Pret* meal out, put it in his bag and zipped it up and we continued to talk.

It turned out he was originally from Streatham in south London and grew up on the same road I used to live on. We had loads to talk about and our conversation got pretty deep as he talked about wanting to change and how to get his life back on track. He asked my advice about what he should do. I said two main things. Firstly, I told him about my work and why I believe in grace, forgiveness and new-starts. I emphasised how vitally important his life and decisions were, both for him and his family. Secondly, I said that if you are serious about wanting to change then you should take the meal you had just stolen out of your bag and hand it back to the staff in the *Pret-a-Manger*. I wasn't sure how much he took in about grace and new starts, but my suggestion to return the stolen food certainly landed. He got very agitated, indignant and started shouting: 'Nah, don't make me do that...that's too much bruv. You cannot make me do that.'

I said that I could not make him do anything. I was simply saying what I thought would be best for him. If he was serious about changing, start now. You could see him grappling with the challenge and he blurted out a series of self-justifications. He said he was skint, hungry and needed the meal - but I offered to buy him another meal if he did it. He said the meal would just be thrown away anyway so what was the point?

I said the point was because truthfulness matters. If he wanted to change he had to start by being truthful and this was a good opportunity. We spoke about how every recovery programme was built on truth and honesty: to overcome addictions you needed to turn away from the kind of bullshit, lying and cheating that addicts get stuck in. He calmed down but decided against my suggestion to take the food back. We continued to speak for another half an hour or so about life, faith, football and what change involves. I prayed for him which he said he appreciated and we hugged and said goodbye. I don't know how much he will recall of any of conversation. But it was the challenge I gave him about the meal which was the most significant part of our chat. It was the only thing which really cut through the fog.

There is a lot of talk about 'speaking truth to power' these days. And often for very good reasons: the powerful need to hear truth about poverty and injustice. But what is talked about far less is the importance of speaking truth to those without power. They need truth as well. Not a truth which crushes, condemns or castigates, but a grace-filled, compassionate form of truth. A truth which refuses to collude with damaging behaviour and helps give them power to overcome their challenges.

As I see daily in my work and each week at our church drop-in The Vine, actually helping people with complex issues involves cutting through the fog of untruth. I simply don't think it is possible to really help anyone on the basis of untruth. This is the inescapable problem with begging: the scenarios presented as the premise for needing cash are almost never truthful. And if the truth sets people free, deceit keeps people imprisoned. Authentic love – the kind that endures, changes people and means something – is never just about soft forms of acceptance, kindness and generosity. Authentic love is always made up of grace and truth.

<https://gracetruth.blog/2024/10/27/cutting-through-the-fog-of-untruth/>

• **Jon Kuhrt** has worked with people affected by homelessness for 30 years. He is a former government adviser on how faith groups address rough sleeping & is now CEO of Hope into Action¹ <https://www.hopeintoaction.org.uk/>

• **Hope into Action's annual conference 'Restorers of Hope' is on 12 March 2025.**

<https://www.hopeintoaction.org.uk/hope-into-actions-annual-conference-2025-restorers-of-hope>

• **Early bird tickets available here:** <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/hopeintoactionuk/1436689>

Ian Linden: Down to earth after Christmas

December 26, 2024: A down to earth liturgical battering awaits us after Christmas. No more “Away in the Manger”. Nor sweet, and posh, little voices from King's College Chapel. The wrapping paper in the bin, we hear about a stoning (St. Stephen on 26 December) and more killings, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents (28 December). Both have resonances today.

In the Acts of the Apostles St. Luke describes how Stephen, a Greek-speaking deacon, is stoned to death for delivering a long and highly critical sermon attacking his “stiff-necked” fellow Jews for rejecting Christ. Today it might be censured as antisemitism.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, the only Gospel to tell this story, Herod is portrayed as wanting to kill the Christ child. But all Herod has to go on is location, Bethlehem, a small village, not far from Jerusalem. So, the order goes out to kill all boys in Bethlehem under two years old. Perhaps 20 would have been killed. Collateral damage in today's terms. These days the ‘acceptable’ number can be calculated by algorithm.

The scale of the Bethlehem atrocity is, of course, not the main point for Matthew who is placing Jesus within the scriptural theme of Moses' escape as a baby from the Egyptian Pharaoh. Like today's authoritarian rulers Herod did in fact murder potential rivals. The Gospel tells a plausible story even if scripture scholars doubt its historical accuracy.

Well, you might say, such biblical stories are nothing compared with our own pre-Christmas diet of mass killings in Syria, the individual torture of Sarah Sharif, the rape, sexual abuse, and all manner of perversity offered up on Radio 4 News breakfast, lunch, tea and supper. In short, Radio 4, our premier news service, seems determined to convince us its audience of what the Catholic Catechism calls Original Sin. And how strange that the BBC campaign to protect children from harmful content on social media doesn't appear to recognise the prevalence of harmful content on its own radio and TV channels.

Should we be wondering whether round the world both individuals and groups of people are very little safer from murderous brutality today than they were two thousand years ago? Has humanity at heart not changed? Even asking the question draws a secular society close to some theological insights.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), described evil as “the loss” or “absence of good” following St. Augustine nearly eight centuries earlier who wrote that evil is the “privation of good” (the loss of something normally present). Evil has no positive existence and is the product of the “will deficient” of human beings. So far clear enough. Though this takes some absorbing. But Aquinas in Part One of his *Summa Theologiae*, his training manual for peripatetic Dominican preachers, lands us amongst some tricky syllogisms and the issue gets a lot more complicated. But then the idea of evil itself is complex.

In a general sense, Aquinas says, goodness is God's gift to creation, and so to us, integral to our humanity; we are each endowed with the goodness proper to our nature. Animals, each with their specific disposition, are also endowed with their particular goodness. But ours is conditioned by the additional gift of reason and the ability to act purposefully for what we understand to be our good. In other words, there is a moral law written into human nature. Evil in human beings is the absence of that goodness, an absence that causes us to be drawn away from our proper disposition and into inhumanity.

It is difficult to find the right words to describe why and how we are drawn away from the good. The word traditionally used was Concupiscence. Thanks to some degree to St. Augustine's pre-occupations, concupiscence unfortunately has tended to become a synonym of lust. St. Anselm of Canterbury's (1033-1109) description is the “privation of the righteousness that any man (person) ought to possess”. It suggests more widely the all-important social dimension to human goodness and evil. And for Anselm the privation is mitigated by Grace which, Catholics would say, is seen working in exemplary fashion in the lives of the saints.

Hannah Arendt captures another characteristic of evil in her controversial 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Classics 2006. She portrayed Eichmann as a man whose horrendous crimes sprang from his not thinking. “It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity” that drew him into the Nazi project of the Holocaust. Eichmann had no special personal traits except “an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement”. For Arendt, it was his apparent ordinariness, his banality, the absence of anything that would separate him from the Nazi herd, that led him into crimes against humanity and into a Jerusalem court room in 1962.

In her second Reith lecture this year, Dr Gwen Adshead, a distinguished forensic psychiatrist and psychotherapist who at Broadmoor treats perpetrators of extreme violence, addresses the common question "Aren't They All Evil?". That word 'Evil', she argued, should only be used as an adjective, never a noun. In some ways similar to Arendt, she spoke about how 'cognitive distortions' and 'dysregulated emotions' can create an 'evil state of mind' in otherwise ordinary people. In a profoundly Christian analysis she identifies the seven deadly sins as conditions conducive to an evil mind, placing her analysis within Aquinas' conceptual framework, the absence or loss of the good.

The perpetrators of monstrously evil deeds may be otherwise quite ordinary people. We should not be sheltered from that reality by easy accusations and easy answers. Once we blamed Adam and Eve now it is dodgy DNA. It's hard for secular-minded people to discuss the issue because so much of the available vocabulary is religious: temptation, sin, weakness, guilt, wrong, Grace. The tabloids feel free to use evil as a headline noun. The *Today* programme has to make do with 'inappropriate' and 'unacceptable'.

Christmas inevitably reminds us of the plight of children and refugees in conflict zones and in our own society, the sixth richest country in the world, but with 4.2 million children living below the poverty line and 117,000 homeless households in temporary accommodation. Not asleep on the hay but no way for children to be living.

War does not simply kill and maim children but damages psychologically those who survive. I encounter this damage working in a charity trying to help children in Maronite schools in a poor neighbourhood of Beirut, Lebanon's capital city. We see the consequences of poverty and trauma, from speech defects to severe behaviour problems.

Some of the Syrians in Lebanon are taking their children back to an uncertain future in Syria. What must Christmas be like in the uncertainties of Ukraine? I remember a mural in an old Serbian Orthodox church showing two women sitting around a large cooking pot preparing a meal for the family in the manger. It had survived fire-damage from the 1990s Balkans war.

My own carved wooden Malawian nativity set is as down to earth as that Serbian mural though short on sheep now. The Christmas octave reminds us that Jesus's parents had to flee Herod's violence with their refugee child, the child who came home to reveal the meaning of holiness.

<https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/down-to-earth-after-christmas>

• *Professor Ian Linden is Visiting Professor at St Mary's University, Strawberry Hill, London. A past director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, he was awarded a CMG for his work for human rights in 2000. He has also been an adviser on Europe and Justice and Peace issues to the Department of International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. Ian chairs a new charity for After-school schooling in Beirut for Syrian refugees and Lebanese kids in danger of dropping out partnering with CARITAS Lebanon and work on board of Las Casas Institute in Oxford with Richard Finn OP. His latest book was Global Catholicism published by Hurst in 2009.*

JUBILEE YEAR 2025 'PILGRIMS OF HOPE'

The Jubilee Year started on December 26, 2024, the feast of St. Stephen. Pope Francis opened the Holy Doors in the four Roman Papal Basilicas. In addition, he opened one in the Roman prison of Rebibbia, marking a historic moment in the history of Jubilee years. It will be the first time that a Holy Door is opened in a penal institution. Archbishop Fisichella, during a press conference on October 28 emphasized that this door should be seen as "a symbol of all the prisons in the world". The Jubilee Year will end on the feast of the Epiphany in 2026.

POPE OPENS HOLY DOOR AT ROME PRISON

Source: Vatican News December 26, 2024

Pope Francis opened a Holy Door and celebrated Mass for inmates and staff at Rebibbia New Complex Prison in Rome today. Arriving at the prison, the Pope spoke about the importance of opening the Door there. In front of the prison's chapel, the Church of Our Father, he explained that he wanted everyone to "have the opportunity to fling open the doors to their hearts and to understand that hope never disappoints." After walking through the Holy Door himself, the Pope presided over Mass in the church. In his homily, Pope Francis reflected on the historic reason for his visit, describing it as "a beautiful gesture of opening." But more than simply opening doors, the Pope encouraged the prisoners present, to open their hearts. Brotherhood, he said, is "open hearts." The Pope warned against closed, hardened hearts, which keep us from living. He explained that the Jubilee gives us the grace to "fling open" our hearts to hope. Even in the most difficult and challenging times, he reassured, hope does not disappoint.

Pope Francis likened hope to an anchor on the shore, tied securely with rope. "Sometimes, the rope is hard," he continued, "and it hurts our hands." Yet even in these moments, the anchor of hope keeps us moving forward, because, he said, there is always something ahead of us. When one's heart is closed, it becomes hard like stone; it forgets tenderness," the Pope cautioned, expressing this is why it is necessary to keep the doors of our hearts open, even in the most difficult situations. He challenged the prisoners present to be open to hope, encouraging them as he said, "everyone knows how to do it."

Pope Francis also explained that everyone knows if their heart is closed or half-closed, and concluded by reminding those present that the Holy Door he opened is "a sign of the door of our heart." Pope Francis asked for their prayers, telling the group that he truly prays for them, and that it is "not just a figure of speech."

At the end of the Mass, some of the prisoners and guards presented the Pope with gifts, including a miniature reproduction of the Holy Door and a basket containing oil, cookies, and ceramics. The Prison Administration gave Pope Francis a painting of Christ as the Saviour created by a former prison officer, artist Elio Lucente. The Pope, in turn, gave the prison a parchment commemorating the event.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/51390>

Watch the event on the Vatican Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XlqDOSve

THE LOGO FOR THE JUBILEE YEAR



The new Dicastery for Evangelization, was entrusted with coordinating the Holy See's preparations for the Holy Year 2025 . A competition was launched, open to all, to create the Logo. A total of 294 entries were received from 213 cities and 48 different countries, with participants ranging in age from 6 to 83.

Archbishop Fisichella (the current pro-prefect for the New Evangelization section of the Dicastery) commented: "In fact, many hand-drawn designs were received from children from all over the world, and it was really moving to go through these drawings which were the fruit of imagination and simple faith."

During the judging, the works were identified only by a number so that the author remained anonymous. On June 11th, the three final projects were submitted to Pope Francis to select the one that struck him the most. "After looking at the projects several times and expressing his preference, the project of Giacomo Travisani was chosen," Archbishop Fisichella said.

Giacomo Travisani reflected on what motivated his submission. He said how he had imagined all people moving forward together, able to push ahead "thanks to the wind of Hope that is the Cross of Christ and Christ himself."

THE LOGO EXPLAINED

The Logo shows four stylized figures to indicate all of humanity from the four corners of the earth. They each embrace one another, indicating the solidarity and brotherhood that must unite peoples. The first figure is clinging to the Cross. The underlying waves are choppy to indicate that the pilgrimage of life is not always on calm waters. The lower part of the Cross is elongated turning into an anchor, which dominates the movement of the waves. Anchors often have been used as metaphors for hope. The image shows how the pilgrim's journey is not individual, but rather communal, with the signs of a growing dynamism that moves more and more toward the Cross.

"The Cross is not static," Fisichella suggested, "but dynamic, bending toward and meeting humanity as if not to leave it alone, but rather offering the certainty of its presence and the reassurance of hope."

More information on <https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en.html>

NATIONAL JUSTICE AND PEACE NETWORK PLANS TO CELEBRATE THE JUBILEE YEAR

At the Post Conference Catch up on line on October 31, Anne Peacey revealed the NJPN plans for the Jubilee Year. She commented that opening doors is a powerful image. An open door is a sign of welcome to everyone. A closed door is a barrier that keeps us within, apart, maybe a sign of closed minds.

This Jubilee Year is a time to reflect and refocus. With whom do I sit down? Which groups and organisations do I work in partnership with? Who are the keyholders in my parish who can open the door? What keeps the door shut? Which doors should we be outside knocking to come in?

As pilgrims of hope, NJPN resolves to open doors for the future generations ensuring as we go that no-one is left behind.

Journey with us this jubilee year as we open the doors to a just peace for current and future generations. Join us as we commit to taking restorative action to bring about peace and justice for migrants, for people living in poverty and equality and for a world in climate crisis. We owe it to future generations to make this Jubilee permanent.

Areas important to NJPN for focus during the year: Movement of people - The environment - Peace and areas of conflict - Poverty and inequality in UK and globally.

Opening doors programme 2025

Thursday February 6	Opening doors to those affected by slavery and trafficking – online
Monday April 7	Opening doors to refugees and asylum seekers – speaking to people themselves -online
Saturday May 10	Opening doors to a sustainable future for all people; day shared with CAFOD, place tba
Fri – Sun July 25-27	‘A Just Peace’ Annual NJPN Conference at Swanwick

POEM FOR DECEMBER 28: THE HOLY INNOCENTS (REFUGEE) BY MALCOLM GUILTE

Malcolm Guite writes: The poem from my Anthology *Waiting on the Word* reflects on the fact that today, the fourth day of Christmas, is the feast day of the Holy Innocents. It is the day the Church remembers the story, told in Matthew's Gospel of the appalling cruelty and wickedness of Herod in ordering the massacre of innocent children, in a bid to protect his own power-base. Appalling, but only too familiar.

What Herod did then, is still being done by so many present day Herods. This scarred and wounded world is the world into which Jesus was born, the world he came to save, and amongst those brought by his blood through the grave and gate of death and into the bliss of Heaven are those children of Bethlehem who died for his name without ever knowing him. But he knows them, as he knows and loves every child in Syria, and he says of them, to every Herod, 'Whatsoever ye do unto the least of these, ye do it unto me.'

Listen to Malcolm reading the poem here: <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2024/12/28/the-holy-innocents-refugee-10/>

REFUGEE

We think of him as safe beneath the steeple,
Or cosy in a crib beside the font,
But he is with a million displaced people
On the long road of weariness and want.

For even as we sing our final carol
His family is up and on that road,
Fleeing the wrath of someone else's quarrel,
Glancing behind and shouldering their load.

Whilst Herod rages still from his dark tower
Christ clings to Mary, fingers tightly curled,
The lambs are slaughtered by the men of power,
And death squads spread their curse across the world.
But every Herod dies, and comes alone
To stand before the Lamb upon the throne.

- **Malcolm Guite** is a poet-priest and Chaplain of Girton College Cambridge who often travels round Great Britain, and to North America, to give lectures, concerts and poetry readings.
- See here for details of his published works: <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/>
- Additional information here: <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/interviews/>

PODCAST: ALL KINDS OF CATHOLIC

All Kinds of Catholic with Theresa Alessandro

A new episode, a different conversation, every Wednesday!

Email me: theresa@KindsofCatholic.co.uk

Facebook and X/Twitter Give me a follow [@KindsofCatholic](#)

Listen here: <https://kindsofcatholic.buzzsprout.com/>

Episode 27: Gerry shares that, for him, prayer is action. 'If I can help someone I will.' He explains how his significant stammer led him to becoming an engineer who was privileged to help people all over the world, as well as closer to home. While working in the film industry, he describes how his faith 'helped me to stay focussed.'

<https://kindsofcatholic.buzzsprout.com/2333035/episodes/16183572-27-practical-catholic-service>

Episode 28: Pat talks about growing up in Ireland, getting married on the shores of the Atlantic, and coming to England for work. Since the earliest days, when he wasn't allowed to be an altar server, he shares where his faith has fitted into his 93 years and how he feels age has strengthened it.

<https://kindsofcatholic.buzzsprout.com/2333035/episodes/16189898-28-blessed-that-i-was-brought-up-a-catholic>

Episode 29: Fr Gerry shares how his views of the priesthood have changed over the years. He describes something of how being close to terrible violence has affected him. In exploring Fr Gerry's work supporting people in prison, their struggles are held up to the light too.

<https://kindsofcatholic.buzzsprout.com/2333035/episodes/16285522-29-prayer-gives-a-very-strong-cutting-edge>

Episode 30: In this special Christmas episode, Jonathan shares how his faith journey has led him to church music. He explains how sacred music offers praise upwards and outwards and, he hopes, helps us all to pray.

This episode includes some of the beautiful Christmas music which Jonathan has produced.

<https://kindsofcatholic.buzzsprout.com/2333035/episodes/16245190-30-to-wait-for-that-start-of-midnight-mass>

LEAVING EGYPT PODCAST

A podcast from Together for the Common Good hosted by Al Roxburgh and Jenny Sinclair exploring what it means to be God's people in an age of unravelling. Next Conversations Forum: Wednesday 22nd January 6pm (GMT) 10am (PST)

Alongside our fortnightly Leaving Egypt podcast, we hold monthly online conversation forums for our subscribers. On January 22, we'll be joined by previous podcast guests Sian Wade and Avril Bagient. Each brings deep experience, from the Pentecostal and Catholic traditions respectively, on listening to the Spirit in our communities. We meet on Zoom and all subscribers are welcome - to join, all you need to do is subscribe (it's free) and you will receive an invitation.

To subscribe click here: <https://leavingegyptpodcast.substack.com/p/join-our-leaving-egypt-conversations>

COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES IN BRITAIN 2024/2025 SCHOOLS MEDIA COMPETITION

Pope Francis' has decreed that 2025 will be a year of Jubilee using the theme, 'Pilgrims of Hope'. He urges us to look for signs of hope in the world around us and to work for peace and justice.

Columban Missionaries in Britain have launched their 2024/2025 Schools Media Competition entitled 'Jubilee: Pilgrims of Hope'. Encouraging creativity and faith engagement with issues in the world today, this year's competition welcomes both written and image entries until 7 February 2025, with winners being announced on 10 March 2025. Cash prizes will be awarded to the winning entrants.

The competition is targeted at students aged between 13-18 years old. Students will find the Columban Competition website an essential resource with information on the theme of Jubilee and Pilgrimage plus examples of Columban projects and inspirational communities. There are also details on submission of entries and a helpful FAQ page. The website provides material suitable for students, teachers and parents.
<https://www.columbancompetition.com/>

PEACE SUNDAY 19 JANUARY

Since its establishment in 1967 by Pope St Paul VI, the Popes have taken the World Day of Peace on the 1st January as an opportunity to offer a message on peace related topics.

Every year, with the support of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, England and Wales, we promote Peace Sunday on the second Sunday in Ordinary Time as a way of observing the World Day of Peace and promoting the Pope's message for that year.

In 2025, Peace Sunday will fall on Sunday 19 January and our hope is that as many parishes as possible across the country will mark the day.

Every year we publish resources to help parishes and groups observe Peace Sunday. This year's resources are available to download below and you can order them by emailing peacesunday@paxchristi.org.uk

Pope Francis' message for the World Day of Peace has been published and his theme is 'Forgive us our trespasses: Grant us your peace'. The message speaks of how we must listen to the 'pleas of an endangered humanity', how the year of Jubilee inspires us to seek the liberating justice of God in our world and how by 'opening our hearts to our brothers and sisters, we will restore God's justice on earth' and 'move forward to achieve the goal of peace'. You can download a copy of the full message from the link below: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/20241208-messaggio-58giornatamondiale-pace2025.pdf>

PAX CHRISTI has produced some excellent resources – see below:

Pope Francis' Message for the World Day of Peace 2025: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/20241208-messaggio-58giornatamondiale-pace2025.pdf>

Justpeace – December 2024 (Including a reflection from Sr Katrina Alton on this year's Peace Sunday theme): <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Dec-Jan-2025-final.pdf>

Peace Sunday 2025 Liturgy Booklet (Including homily notes prepared by Fr. Gerry Mcflynn): https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Peace-Sunday-2025-Liturgy-Booklet_Final.pdf

Peace Sunday 2025 Prayer Card: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Prayer-card-2025.pdf>
– (order from our shop here: paxchristi.org.uk/product/prayer-card-peace-sunday-2025/)

Peace Sunday 2025: Letter to Parishes from Bishop Moger: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Peace-Sunday-25-Bishop-Moger-Letter-to-Parishes-Final.pdf>

Peace Sunday 2025 Poster: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Peace-Sunday-25-Poster-Final.pdf>

Peace Sunday 2025: Children's Activities and Prayers: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Childrens-Activities-and-Prayers-Peace-Sunday-2025-1.pdf>

Peace Sunday 2025: Children's Liturgy: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Peace-Sunday-2025-Childrens-Liturgy.pdf>

Peace Sunday 2025: Children's Liturgy Worksheet: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Peace-Sunday-2025-Childrens-Liturgy-Worksheet.pdf>

Peace Sunday 2025: Form time resource for secondary schools Retreats and courses: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fpaxchristi.org.uk%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2024%2F12%2FPeace-Sunday-2025-Form-time-resource.pptx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

RETREATS

St Beuno's retreat house and Jesuit spirituality centre, (Diocese of Wrexham) Tremeirchion, St Asaph, LL17 0AS, [Wales 01745 583444 info@beunos.com](http://Wales01745583444info@beunos.com)
<https://www.beunos.com/retreats>

THE ANTHONY WALKER FOUNDATION – PEACE SUNDAY EVENT

The Anthony Walker Foundation (AWF) was established in 2006 after the racially motivated murder of Anthony in Huyton, just outside of Liverpool. Anthony's family and friends did not want his murder to be another statistic and wanted his name to live on with a positive, lasting legacy.

The Foundation works to tackle racism, hate crime and discrimination by providing educational opportunities, victim support services and by promoting equity and inclusion for all.

We believe that education is key to dismantling racism. Our aim is to empower and educate young people to challenge hate crimes/incidents and embrace anti-racism through collective learning and thought-provoking discussions. With the aid of positive group participation and engagement with our young people, we work to create a society free from hate and prejudice.

We know that prejudicial views, unconscious bias and stereotypes often start at a very young age as a result of (but not limited to) environment and upbringing. Anti-racism work should always start in the home but should be closely followed and supported by what is being taught in our schools. By educating pupils from a young age, we hope to instil anti-racist values before prejudice and discriminations develop.

Through our educating we encourage young people to challenge attitudes that lead to harm against others and to celebrate and welcome all that makes us different. We never encourage anyone to place themselves in danger when challenging racist attitudes, rather we give people the tools and confidence to deal with matters sensitively.

Via workshops and assemblies, we deliver educational sessions to young people across the Merseyside region from primary to sixth form and college. Our sessions always celebrate Anthony's positive life and legacy. Through telling Anthony's story, we hope to teach young people the importance of kindness, compassion and community.

In 2020 – 2021 the Foundation has directly connected with over 7,000 young people in educational settings and community organisations across the Merseyside city region and beyond. There is a general consensus among many school leaders that more work needs to be done to address racial equity in education which the Foundation is well placed to do.

At AWF we offer a comprehensive suite of educational modules focused around our anti-racism message that can be adapted to different age groups. These modules can be adapted for assemblies or workshops. This suite of modules includes '**Speak Out! Stop Hate**' which promotes hate crime awareness and the importance of speaking out and reporting hate when you see it.

Through our impactful '**See Me, Be Me**' campaign, which was developed in partnership with M&S Bank, we developed an educational module which focuses on the importance of positive role models from minoritised backgrounds. This module aims to empower young people to feel confident about their futures.

Our **Love What Make Us Different** assemblies developed for primary age children focuses on the need to love and celebrate diversity. At these assemblies pupils learn the importance of not prejudging, what it means to be an anti-racist, and showing love and support to each other.

As a leading anti-racist charity in the North West, our education curriculum is always under development and review to ensure that we are leaders in the field and all of our content is cutting edge. We support schools and colleges to become leaders in anti-racist practice and support them to foster an educational environment of inclusion and diversity that is free of racism and hate.

In the last 5 years, the Anthony Walker Foundation has worked with nearly 40,000 young people through educational and outreach programmes; supported nearly 10,000 people who have experienced hate crime; and has engaged with thousands of community members in a bid to build safer, stronger and more thriving communities.

19 January - Talk for Peace Sunday in the Gibbard Room Metropolitan Cathedral at 1.30 pm Dr Gee Walker will speak on the subject of 'Forgiveness Reconciliation and Peace'. Gee set up the Anthony Walker Foundation after her son was brutally murdered.

<https://anthonywalkerfoundation.com/>

DIARY 2025

JANUARY

9 Merseyside Pax Christi meeting 1.45 for 2.00pm start. Venue, usually St.Michael's Parish Room, Horne St Liverpool L6 5EH. Contact sheilacogley@yahoo.co.uk to confirm arrangements.

17 CAFOD Quiz Night at Our Lady's Parish Centre, Ellesmere Port Town Centre at 7.30 pm Entrance £3 for adults and £1 for children and the usual raffle will take place with good prizes. Refreshments will be available at the interval. All proceeds will go towards CAFOD's latest development project. Contact Tony Walsh on 0151 355 6419

18 A Year of Hope: An Introduction to the Jubilee Year: 2025 is a Jubilee year, but what does that mean? How will the Church be celebrating it? What can I do? Join us and our special guests for an exciting introduction to the Jubilee and find out how we can be tangible signs of hope and build a better world together. 10:30am-midday, online. (See pages 7-8) Register here for free and please invite others in your parish who might be interested: <https://cafod.org.uk/news/events/a-year-of-hope-an-introduction-to-the-jubilee-year>

18 Green Action Fair at Hoole Community Centre, Westminster Road, Hoole CH2 3AP 10.30am - 4pm. Free event – open to all.

18 -25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Theme 'Do you believe this' <https://ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2025/>

19 Peace Sunday Theme chosen by Pope Francis is 'Forgive us our trespasses: grant us your peace'. Resources from Pax Christi: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2025/> To know more or register your interest for your parish or group, please email peacesunday@paxchristi.org.uk (See p.11)

19 Archbishop Malcom McMahon with celebrate Mass for Peace at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral 11.00am Pax Christi members will hold a stall in the entrance to the cathedral.

19 Talk for Peace Sunday in the Gibbard Room Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral at 1.30 pm. Dr Gee Walker will speak on the subject of 'Forgiveness Reconciliation and Peace'. Gee set up the Anthony Walker Foundation after her son was brutally murdered in July 2005. (See pages 11-12)

FEBRUARY

6 Opening Doors to Freedom from Trafficking and Slavery NJPN Evening Zoom Meeting <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/>

7 Deadline for entries for Columban Schools Media Competition (p. 10) <https://www.columbancompetition.com/>

13 Merseyside Pax Christi meeting 1.45 for 2.00pm start. Venue, usually St.Michael's Parish Room, Horne St Liverpool L6 5EH Contact sheilacogley@yahoo.co.uk to confirm arrangements.

14 CAFOD Quiz Night See January 17 above

MARCH

2 Church Action on Poverty Sunday People working together to reclaim dignity, agency and power across the UK <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday/>

5 Ash Wednesday Merseyside Pax Christi Walk of Witness through Liverpool City Centre. Start at 1.30pm at St Luke's bombed out church at the top of Bold St.

12 Hope into Action's annual conference 'Restorers of Hope' (See page 5)

<https://www.hopeintoaction.org.uk/hope-into-actions-annual-conference-2025-restorers-of-hope>

Early bird tickets available here: <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/hopeintoactionuk/1436689>

APRIL

7 NJPN meeting on zoom 'Opening doors to refugees and asylum seekers – speaking to people themselves' <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/>

- Many items taken from the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com an invaluable free resource for up-to-date J&P news, events and in-depth articles.
- See current NJPN news here: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/news/>
- Sign up for regular news and information from NJPN (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues for NJPN North West) at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk or contact ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org 020 7901 4864
- Read the WINTER issue of **MOUTHPEACE** the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/11/Mouthpeace-Winter-24.pdf>
- New website for Lancaster Faith and Justice Commission: <https://www.lancasterfaithandjustice.org.uk/>

The views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of NJPN