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Letter for Epiphany Sunday

At this time of year the lamp-posts carry decorations - Santas, or stars, or even the Wise Men whom we remember today.

All year round, some lamp-posts carry "Neighbourhood Watch" notices. These are not decorations – they are warnings: "Outsiders beware: We have you under surveillance! We look after our own!"

Pope Francis has encouraged a different kind of neighbourhood watch – looking out for the poor and the weak. Recognising that they are "our own" and looking out for their needs.

In recent years the Church has called for "An option for the poor". Pope Francis has made that his priority, both by his words and by the example of his rather startling behaviour.

An option means a choice. Choose one option, and you have to put aside another. Choose neighbourly caring, and you have to put aside selfishness. Choose justice, and you have to put aside unfair privilege or discrimination. Opting for the poor means opting out of comfort zones.

Compared to many countries, our country is comfortable and prosperous – but the prosperity is not fairly distributed. Many people in our own country are living in great discomfort – think of the increasing use of foodbanks. Surely that should make all of us feel uncomfortable.

Internationally, the unfairness and the suffering are hugely greater – we only have to look at Syria. Neighbourliness is an even more challenging option.

None of us alone can end the injustice, and the violence to which it often leads – but working together, and starting small and local, our option for the poor can change the unjust culture.

Today, speaking for the Justice and Peace Commission and for all the local workers for Justice and Peace in Scotland, I ask you: Have you room in your heart for another New Year resolution? Even in some small way, will you make the option for the poor?

+ Peter A Moran
Bishop-President, Justice & Peace Commission