

*There was room  
at the Inn before  
the Bedroom Tax*



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Advent is often described a time of waiting for a forthcoming event. Yet the event has already happened. More accurately, then, we are waiting to commemorate the coming Incarnation in the cycle of the liturgy. Another aspect of Advent is that it is one of the church's penitential seasons. At first this seems strange – all the talk of a voice crying in the wilderness and making straight the way of the Lord. But we are being invited to make the necessary changes in order to fully welcome what we are waiting for. After all, if Godhead is willing to see all the prerogatives of majesty, wealth and power stripped away in order to become more accessible to us, might we not want to make a few adjustments too.

Yet it is precisely the overwhelming consumerist orgy that increasingly fills this time of the year, and our complicity with it, that constitutes the wilderness. You don't have to be a Christian to see Mammon as the chief God, surrounded by this year's lesser gods of consumer durables: computer tablets, games and mobile phones, sofas and fridges, an endless supply of food and of course drink (at reduced prices) to fill the fridges until Easter; not to mention the credit facilities allowing you to overspend, as well as a vast variety of perfume and fragrance, supposedly to make you more sexually desirable but quite possibly to keep the stink of commercialised corruption at bay.

Recently, we had an interesting example of the consumer society in a different arena that exemplifies the continued debasing of secular political debate. We are accustomed to parliamentary debate that is reduced into an unseemly and undignified screaming match, whether in Westminster, or increasingly in Holyrood. The SNP Scottish Government published a document outlining plans for the government of Scotland in the event of independence. Within a couple of hours of its publication it had been comprehensively dismissed by politicians and journalists who could not possibly have read, far less absorbed its more than six hundred pages. Nothing to see here; move along with your prejudices intact.

My concern here is less for the validity of the arguments in the document and more with the pre-emptive nature of the dismissal. It is the equivalent of the child with fingers in his ears shouting in order not to hear. Such behaviour would rightly be seen as immature with a child. It is even more so when it is exhibited among supposedly responsible politicians who should give a reasoned and considered critique; and journalists, whose job is to give a balanced and informed account. Tribal politics and partisan journalism are probably unavoidable. When it is compounded with the current levels of mediocrity among so many journalists and politicians in Scotland, however, it is the people, regardless of their political views, who suffer.

Of course that mediocrity only flourishes by public demand. Looking at the news and social media used by the majority of people, they seem content to be dumbed down. Genuine political education and involvement, not to mention spiritual formation, falls between the stools of the desperation of deprivation and pointlessness of over consumption. What draws many people together in politics these days is not discernment so much as self interest in the context of uncritical group loyalty – in short, tribalism.

Recently we have heard concern expressed in Scotland about sectarianism. But I think it is only a subdivision of



tribalism which can encompass not only religious belief, but social class, political or economic views and cultural expressions such as art, food or football. The advantage of tribalism is that it gives a kind of communal identity along with a set of ready-made answers (and rebuttals of any other viewpoint) which pre-empt the need for engaged, constructive or critical thinking. My fear is that many seem to be understanding the Scottish Referendum in tribal terms rather than the personal expression of a desire for society in Scotland. Even more, I fear the effect of the result, whatever it may be, in leaving people feeling disenfranchised, even cheated.

Just over fifty years ago the great American Jesuit social theologian John Courtney Murray wondered whether the US was in danger of becoming a 'tribal unity'. Tribal unity is based on kinship and the enemy tribe is the stranger, no matter who the stranger is. The tribe seeks security in a solidarity that is absolutely intolerant of anything alien to itself. The tribe demands loyalty, which is appropriate to a kinship group but, says Murray, is not a basis for civil society. Those in the tribe speak in terms of 'us and them'. It cannot deal with the stranger in any other terms or by any other means except those of force and violence. 'The tribe is essentially a war-making group.' I think Murray's question is relevant to today's Scotland.

Yet if I allow myself to meet and be met by the stranger, a bond of commonality replaces hostility and the proximity of violence and I am no longer a stranger either. Openness to the other turns mechanical loyalty into the more profound state of trust. The inward looking, rigid structures of the tribe give way to the learning and communication that transform strangers into neighbours, exchanging the sacred roles of host and guest.

There is a passage in Galatians – (5:16ff) on the lusts of the flesh, that one prefers not to get asked to read at mass. After the obvious lusts, however, come 'enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions' (v20), all of which are in a real sense anti-social and divide communities. By comparison the fruits of the Spirit are profoundly social and community building: 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. ... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another' (vv22-6). This stark contrast reminds us of the divisions within society and the need for communal responsibility if we want to live the life of the Spirit in the body of Christ. And Christ's calling, it has been well said, is always personal, but never private.

So we wait in the darkness of winter for the light of hope that has already been yet is still to come. I have heard the Messiah referred to as the bearer of a remembered future; but another good way of taking this mystery to heart for this season or for any time is expressed by the German mystic, Meister Eckhart: *What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself?*

*And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace and if I am not also full of grace?*

*What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son*

*if I do not also give birth to him in my time and in my culture?*

*This, then, is the fullness of time;*

*When the Son of God is begotten in us.*

Tim Duffy

## THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, was published on the Feast of Christ the King and has caused something of a stir. In terms of formal authority an Apostolic Exhortation is a degree lower than a papal encyclical, but higher than other ecclesiastical letters. Apostolic exhortations are commonly issued in response to a Synod of Bishops; as in this case, where it is a reflection on last year's Synod on Evangelisation.

The language tends to be fairly formal, but in this case by section 10, the pope is reminding us that 'an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!'

The average person encounters a hundred thousand words every day, so *Evangelii Gaudium*, which is about half that length, might seem like a brisk jaunt. To read this letter, however, which is very accessible, you have to slow down to take in the distilled wisdom. This is at odds with the consumer society of speed, where you are already looking at the next course of distraction while not paying attention to the one you are meant to be currently digesting.

There is a segment of Catholicism, particularly active online in the US and elsewhere, which sees itself as the last word in religious as well as economic and political truth. This neo-conservative gospel of greed bears as much relation to the real thing as does cream from an aerosol can. Any deviation from their version of the gospel, however, even by the Pope, is to be challenged. They tried it with Benedict: parts of *Caritas in Veritate* were the result of the Pope being hijacked by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, that breeding ground for socialism. And Benedict is supposed to have given in to these Marxists.

Now the argument is slightly different: Francis isn't an economist and doesn't understand the complexity of economics – whereas they do. He is probably well meaning but he doesn't understand that the poor and dispossessed will always be with us; not least because they are doing their utmost, through the unjust use of wealth and power, to ensure it. Their intense focus on an absolute personal morality contrasts with their claims for the need for autonomy and prudential judgement in economic and political matters, and is suspiciously self-serving.

Pope Francis, however, points out that there is no separation: 'Just as the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say "thou shalt not" to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills' (53). Hence the need for the church to be in solidarity with the poor and the dispossessed. This is not some form of liberation theology: it is simple pastoral theology.

Indeed, one of the best descriptions I have encountered of *Evangelii Gaudium* speaks of Francis' assertion of the importance of pastoral theology as a theology of outreach and evangelisation. This explains the twenty five sections at the centre of the Exhortation on the importance of preaching, characterised as dialogue, rooted in scripture and *lectio divina* (152-3), with instructions which are valuable not only for preachers. The exhortation is, among other things, a master class in lived Ignatian spirituality.

Francis makes the point that the exhortation is not a social document, referring us instead to the *Compendium* (184). By this time, however, he has trashed 'trickle down' economics and the idolatry of money (54ff). His

disclaimer in turn is the prologue to thirty sections expounding at the deepest level the social basis of evangelisation. He quotes compellingly from the

*Compendium*

(52): 'Our redemption has a social dimension because "God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men"' (178).

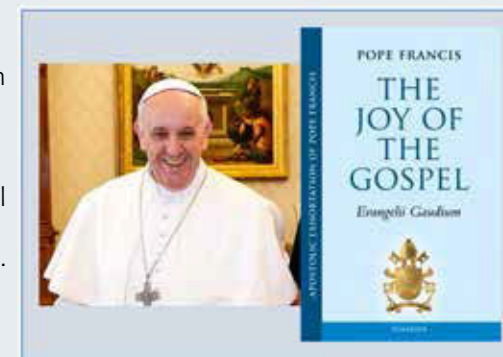
The social dimension leads us to the centrality of the Kingdom. 'Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of "charity à la carte", or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world' (180).

This in turn broadens our responsibility: 'It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven. We know that God wants his children to be happy in this world too, even though they are called to fulfilment in eternity, for he has created all things "for our enjoyment" (1 Tim 6:17), the enjoyment of everyone. It follows that Christian conversion demands reviewing especially those areas and aspects of life "related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good"' (182).

The option for the poor is primarily a theological category, says Francis, which to quote Pope Benedict XVI 'is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty'. And this, Francis says, 'is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor... Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticise governments. It will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk' (198).

Although the option for the poor is not primarily political, nevertheless, 'Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good. We need to be convinced that charity "is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)"' (205). Thus, too, politics is not what is done by politicians, but in its different ways applies to the network of all our relationships in search of the common good through charity – the theological virtue that is, not the handout.

There is much more of compelling richness, opening out the truly evangelical message of the gospel, but drawing on the full tradition of revelation. There is little point in paraphrase when the original is so readily accessible and fruitful. The text is readily available online, and in paperback for under a fiver. The joy isn't only in the title, it's in the reading too, so give yourself a worthwhile present over the Christmas season; and pass it on to a friend.



Tim Duffy



# What IF?

**John Sharp, SCIAF's Campaigns Officer, reflects on a busy year with the IF Campaign**

**A**lmost a year ago a whole group of us gathered in Buchanan Street, Glasgow on a cold January morning to launch the Enough Food for Everyone IF campaign.

The campaign brought together over 200 organisations around the UK, including the Justice & Peace Commission, SCIAF and Christian Aid to call on Prime Minister David Cameron to use the UK's G8 presidency to take action on the root causes of the hunger crisis.

Since the launch, people from all around the country have responded to the campaign, or to be more specific have responded to the scandal of 1 in 8 of the human family living with hunger as part of their daily reality.

People have demonstrated repeatedly this year that we want to make hunger history, this has included over 200 people travelling to Belfast on the eve of the G8 summit and nearly 5,000 people contacting their MSPs about the campaign. Campaigners determination to end hunger has also been fused with an acknowledgement that hunger and poverty have many different causes.

So the IF campaign focused on a number of different issues, from calling for more money to help developing countries adapt to climate change to demanding a clamp down on tax havens. It's also why we developed a list of 'Tartan IF Asks' for the Scottish Government.

We said all along that 2013 could be the beginning of the end of hunger – not wishful thinking but based on the fact that hunger, like poverty, doesn't happen by accident. People are kept hungry, powerless and locked in poverty by global rules, practises and behaviours that only benefit the few.

## So what legacy does the IF campaign leave behind?

In March, after a final push by campaigners, which saw 38 Scottish MPs lobbied by campaigners in four hectic weeks, the UK became the first G8 country to meet the target of spending 0.7% of national income on overseas aid.

In June at the 'Hunger Summit', the second such summit to be convened in the space of twelve months, more than \$4 billion was pledged to fight hunger.

At the G8 summit the fact that tax dodging and land governance were discussed and were part of the final communique, speaks volumes. It wasn't long ago that it would have been unthinkable to hear G8 leaders talking about those issues in the way that they did. Of course we now need to follow up on what has been said and what has been promised.

A little closer to home the Scottish Government recently met two of the 'Tartan Asks'. They doubled the Climate Justice Fund – which will provide extra funding to support projects which are helping developing countries to adapt to climate change. They also announced that they would provide new funding for the six Development Education centres in Scotland – which play a vital role in helping people understand the causes of

hunger and poverty.

So the IF campaign has come to an end, but clearly there is a strong legacy that it leaves behind, particularly in Scotland. The members of the campaign will continue to work together.

SCIAF and Christian Aid are currently working on a joint campaign focusing on the £9 billion that the Scottish Government spends on buying goods and services. We're calling for this money never to be used in ways that exploit workers, harm the environment or reward unethical business.

So the campaigning goes on, and the work of building a just world continues.

Photograph: Colin Hattersley



# Warsaw Climate Conference

**Philippa Bonella of SCIAF reflects on this year's UN Conference on Climate Change in Warsaw**

**T**he Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction.

Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace 2010

I'm just back from the UN Conference on Climate Change, which took place in Warsaw this year, and still struggling to piece together my impressions. The world of climate talks is a new one to me. It is a process perhaps best known for its complexity and breath-taking use of acronyms (there are talks on the ADP, NAMAS, SBSTA, BINGOs and BAP and the list goes on. I sat in the ADP talks for an hour without knowing what the acronym stood for, and was none the wiser at the end).

SCIAF was invited to be part of the Catholic delegation to the conference through our international network CIDSE. Leader of the delegation was Bishop Theo Gomes from Bangladesh, and also prominent was our own partner Fr Freddy D'Souza of Caritas India. There was a strong and valuable Catholic presence at the conference, with a focus on bringing the voices of poor people affected by climate change into the debates.

Speakers from Africa, Asia and Latin America explained the devastating impacts on communities in their countries. In Niger, rising temperatures are causing real problems for small-scale farmers, already living in poverty. 'We have the right to be heard at these talks' said Sabine Attama from Caritas Niger, 'climate change is destroying the dignity of people'.

As the talks began, super-typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines reminded us of the horrific human cost of extreme weather. Yeb Sano, leader of the Filipino delegation to the conference, implored the world to 'stop this madness'. He began a fast throughout the talks in solidarity with his people at home, and inspired hundreds of activists to join him. I was lucky enough to meet this quiet and dignified man and he encouraged the Church to continue its work for justice. 'You give us strength', he told me, as SCIAF and other faith groups signed up to continue a monthly fast up until next year's talks.

In Poland's first ever Climate Mass on Sunday evening, Cardinal Nycz reflected on the damage being caused to the planet and prayed for creation and for environmentalists. Archbishop Migliore, leading the Holy See delegation at the Conference, spoke thoughtfully about his experiences at the talks over the years, and the importance of equity and solidarity as we try to tackle the crises facing the earth.

'We have built a plastic world around ourselves' said Lutheran Reverend Lukas at an interfaith event

sponsored by CIDSE. 'We live as if we are the last generation to inhabit the earth'.

The responsibility of richer nations to lead on climate action is at the heart of the climate talks. If we are to address the devastating changes being experienced by people living in poverty, we in rich countries must commit to reducing our damage to the planet.

When we met with the Scottish Minister Paul Wheelhouse, he explained that he was trying to raise the level of ambition amongst European nations. Even though Scotland's climate targets are tough and may be

hard to achieve, he said, the Government is clear that acting on climate change is morally right.

Churches were a key part of the movement that pushed for strong Scottish Government action on climate change. The result was not just a world-leading Climate Change Act but a Climate Justice Fund, which is helping communities adapt to the challenges of climate change.

Father D'Souza, SCIAF partner and Director of Caritas

India told us: 'Climate change is happening now. For communities already living in poverty, farming and fishing is becoming much harder. Young people are struggling to find alternative livelihoods'.

The conference at Warsaw was disappointing, although not surprising. Limited firm commitments were made, and some countries even went backwards in their pledges. The atmosphere was tense and not conducive to partnership or dialogue. Working long days in the national stadium, we were literally going round in circles as we attended meeting after meeting with government delegations and civil society groups, walking round and round the inner stadium walls. Bishop Gomes was a key reference point for us all, his gentle humour and positivity keeping us focussed on the task, and his stamina challenging all of us, decades younger, to keep going through the evening!

Lorna Gold from Trocaire reminded us of a saying of St Francis: 'Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.'

For SCIAF, we will keep working with the Polish Church in the hope that more can be done during the year of Polish presidency, and we are looking towards the talks in Lima next year and in Paris in 2015. There is still hope that progress can be made and 2015 can be a year of climate justice for all.

At our press conference towards the end of the conference, Yeb Sano, the Filipino delegate, pledged to maintain his fast and SCIAF representatives will be following suit, fasting during the day on the 8th of each month until the conference in Lima next November. It is this spirit of solidarity that was lacking in Warsaw and one which the world desperately needs in the run-up to 2015.

Photograph: CIDSE



*God our loving creator,*

*we thank you that your love for us*

*is without limit or condition*

*and is greater than we could hope for or imagine*

*You promised that light would shine in darkness.*

*Light in our hearts a flame of your love:*

*love that will warm our homes and families,*

*your love that will bring healing.*

*As we prepare in these days*

*for the birth of Jesus, your son and our Brother,*

*we surrender to you the darkness in our lives.*

*We ask you to help us*

*to open our hearts to him. Amen*

*From 'Walk in my Presence'*

*Bishop Peter, Ellen and all  
the members of the National  
Commission, along with Carol and  
Tim thank all our readers for their  
continuing support. We wish them  
the joy of Christmas and God's  
peace for the coming year.*



## Going on a Diet

**Margaret Lawrence, of the Cupar J&P Group, introduces social justice at the most basic level – what we eat.**

Living with poverty is undignified, exhausting, demoralising. For most of us, it is experienced at second hand, from a distance. It may make us feel uncomfortable, guilty, powerless. We'll probably contribute to some of the many charities who help alleviate that most de-humanising of conditions in others. Still we want to do more, but where and how?

Poverty can be seen as something that affects folks far away, remote from our daily lives. Now it's more and more being seen on our own doorsteps – as the number of Big Issue sellers, and people begging increases on each visit to a city. Why is this needed? It's surely not up to us 'middle folk' to provide for the temporarily or permanently disadvantaged in this way. We've paid taxes and supported our Welfare State – the one which our parents and grandparents worked and fought for enabling us to be educated, vaccinated and bespectacled.

So how did we get here in 21st century Scotland, with foodbanks sprouting in our midst? What can we effectively do? Well, we all have our thoughts and plans on changing the structures, whilst sustaining wherever we can. At the recent One World Week lunch, organised by the Cupar Justice and Peace group in October, a few more avenues worth exploring were opened.

The Justice and Peace group chose Food Sovereignty as their topic and asked 'Fife Diet' to take part in the event with us. Fife Diet is a small but dynamic group which actively encourages folks to put the ethics of food sovereignty at the heart of their food choices. Their main aim is to encourage and advise, helping us ordinary mortals, to eat local and ethically grown food aiming for an 80/20 balance, that is, sourcing local products for 80% of our diet, with 20% from further afield. That's a HUGE challenge, but Fife Diet realise the difficulties; so they are delighted if we manage to change our diet in smaller steps.

The good folks of Cupar, meanwhile, enjoyed a delicious lunch of home-made soup. Making your own soup from locally sourced ingredients can be a neglected skill in an age of ready made alternatives. More and more people, especially young folks with small budgets and hungry children, are discovering that it is both enjoyable

and brings worthwhile benefits.

A particular highlight for me was the next course, a delicious rice dish made with Kilombero rice. Mags of Fife Diet, added lemon, fennel, kohlrabi and broad beans, all locally sourced, to create a tasty nutritious dish. Kilombero rice is grown by small farmers in Malawi. It is fairly traded by Just Trading Scotland which has helped many small farmers – the group of people in the world who are most often hungry – out of the poverty trap. This balance of the local and the justly traded summed up the aim of the day.

After lunch Teresa Martinez of Fife Diet gave an animated and powerful presentation on Food Sovereignty. Her main points were:

Hunger is not a question of scarcity or lack of food but of maldistribution and inequality.

800 million people go hungry every day – 80% of the world's hungry people are directly involved in food production. Peasants and small farmers make up half of the world population and grow at least 70% of the world's food.

We can feed the world with free range farm animal production systems and lower meat diets in developed countries.

We cannot achieve Food Security without achieving

Food Sovereignty. Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food, agriculture, livestock, and fisheries systems in contrast to having food cultivation largely dictated by international market forces.

We need a rapid and significant shift away from conventional, monoculture-based and industrialised and chemical production geared to producing cash crops. This limits and restricts food productivity.

We need to increase small scale, sustainable, regenerative production systems that also considerably improve the productivity of small-scale farmers. This will only happen with the development of Local Food Systems in the North and in the Global South.

This inspiring talk (and enjoyable lunch) gave us all ideas about how, by slightly altering our diet, we could be doing our bit towards stewardship of our God's earth while creating a more just and equitable outcome for the world's food producers.

Now there's a real double Whammy!

Further information on the Fife Diet and Food Sovereignty can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/o3to974> and information on the 90 Kg rice challenge can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/lomann9>

## Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions

**Grace Buckley reports on her attendance at the European Annual Workshop and General Assembly in Berlin**

This year's Workshop and General Assembly was hosted by the German Commission in Berlin in September, and was attended by representatives of 22 Commissions. The subject of the Workshop may have sounded a bit grim – *Dealing with a Violent Burdened Past and the Aftermath of Dictatorship as a Challenge to European Societies!* – but as our German colleagues said, we need to be open about our history if we are to learn and move on, and, as we discovered, there are challenges and lessons for us all in the experiences of Germany under National Socialism and Communism.

In the course of the Workshop we visited a former STASI headquarters (now a museum) and a STASI prison, the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen and an exhibition in the former Gestapo HQ. We also had presentations from a number of experts on the issues. It became clear that a major area of difficulty for people was how to deal with the past, particularly when some of the perpetrators still lived among people, including their victims. Was it better to put everything in the past and move on, or did this deny justice and the possibility of closure to surviving victims and/or their families?

One point made repeatedly was the need to get the facts accepted rather than perpetuating myths. Acceptance of the truth had to be the basis for moving forward. It also became very clear that to avoid any repetition, we need to put the human dignity of each person at the centre of what we do in society.

The Workshop ended with a pilgrimage from the Plötzensee prison in which many of the opponents of the Nazis had died to the church of Regina Martyrum where they are commemorated.

The General Assembly this year was particularly important as decisions had to be made on the future of the Conference. The central issue has been the provision and funding of a permanent Secretariat. Until recently, the Commission from which the Conference President had come, had provided the secretarial support, but latterly

there had been difficulty in getting a Commission to take on these functions.

The current President, Bishop William Kenney, had investigated a number of options and at the General Assembly, he tabled a proposal that the secretarial services should be provided by COMECE (the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union) for an initial period of three years. The Conference of Justice & Peace Europe would still have its independence, with its own President and Executive Committee running it. After some fairly heartfelt discussion and some nervousness about the implications for the future, it was agreed in principle that we should proceed down this route.

The new General Secretary will be Stefan Lunte and the Conference office will now be based in Brussels. Bishop Kenney will remain as President for a further year to bed in the new arrangements. He will then be succeeded by Archbishop Jean-Clause Hollerich of Luxembourg who is a Jesuit. The new Executive Committee has representatives from England, Malta, France, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Austria and the Ukraine.

The other major piece of work for the General Assembly was to consider the proposal for the Concerted Action for 2014. The subject matter will be youth unemployment which is a major issue, with several of the European countries represented having youth unemployment rates in excess of 50%. There was unanimous acceptance of the proposed Concerted Action and the draft text has been circulated for comment before it is finalised. Watch this space, as they say!

The General Assembly ended with a definite feeling that change was in the air. The next three years have been secured in terms of secretarial support. Now the constituent Commissions need to decide where the Conference goes from here. There is no lack of work that we can do together, if we are so minded. What we need is the will.

## The 2013 Romero Lecture

**Grace Buckley attended the lecture and provides the following account**

This year's Romero Lecture, entitled A Disturbing Truth: Romero, the Poor and the Church was given by the well-known writer and former master of the Dominican order Fr. Timothy Radcliffe to a capacity audience in the Lauriston Centre in Edinburgh on 1st November. Fr. Timothy admitted freely that he had known little details about Archbishop Romero when he was asked to give the talk but he joked that one of his fellow Dominicans had commented that ignorance had never stopped him giving a talk before! This light introduction was to soften the audience up for a fairly hard hitting talk.

Fr. Timothy began with the reflection that Oscar Romero had been quite a shy, indeed timid, man who hated ideologies and valued being in communion with Rome. So how had he come to be martyred? Fr. Timothy suggested it was down to his homilies. At a time when people could not speak out, everyone listened to Oscar Romero's homilies which were broadcast. When blowing up his original radio station did not work, and the Vatican would not act to stop him, his opponents decided the only way to deal with him was to kill him.

Archbishop Romero told the truth in his homilies about what was happening and this was not acceptable to those in power. He told the truth of the Word of God, at a time when people in El Salvador were burying their bibles, because to be found with one was dangerous. Why was the bible so disturbing? Fr. Timothy suggested that we tend in the UK to see the bible as instructions or statements from God, but Oscar Romero saw the bible as a conversation with God which is transformative rather than informative.

For Archbishop Romero, the choice was dialogue or a resort to violence. He used the bible for dialogue not in order to find something in it which would prove God agreed with him. Fr. Timothy's first challenge to the audience was that in the UK too often what is described as debate or dialogue is anything but. It is another form of violence in which we use words to hurt. Perhaps the first point to be taken from Oscar Romero is the need to attend to the Word of God with open hearts and ears.

The second challenge from Romero is the recognition of the violence which is visited on the friends of God – the

poor. Archbishop Romero told the truth about this violence. He was the voice of the voiceless, the name of the nameless. The question for us is how aware are we of the violence suffered by the poor in the UK. There are many different kinds of poverty. We are the 6th richest nation in the world but many people can't afford to eat now, many children come to school hungry. The homeless are dying of poverty in our streets. Statistics don't measure the pain and despair of the poor, particularly the young.

The next challenge for us from Oscar Romero is in respect of the use of language to put people down. In El Salvador, the claim was that the poor endangered 'national security'. In the UK we seek now to differentiate between the 'deserving' poor and the 'skivers'. Oscar Romero refused to collude with these myths about the poor. He found hope and love in the poor. Fr. Timothy quoted the founder of L'Arche 'the poor do good to us not the other way round' because often with them we find generosity, compassion and humanity.

How therefore do we open society's eyes to what is happening? Oscar Romero used symbolic gestures, such as the Missa Unica when he concelebrated with the priests of the Archdiocese the funeral Mass for Fr. Rutillio Grande, the only Mass in the Archdiocese that day. It was a way of saying we are all one body and what happens to one, happens to all. We need to act and great gestures help, such as that of Pope Francis visiting the island of Lampedusa after the drowning of African immigrants and using his visit to challenge 'the globalisation of indifference'.

Oscar Romero accepted the likelihood of his death – the archetypal way of witness. In the UK there have no martyrs in recent times but is that, Fr. Timothy asked, because we have become a tolerant nation or because we Christians are so innocuous? We need to witness by supporting the poor. When we read the Word of God, we need to be open to love. Christianity is not a lifestyle choice but an invitation to be caught up in the all-encompassing love of God. This may demand a radical self-giving but the average martyrdom is a quiet ongoing thing – giving our lives bit by bit. The challenge, he suggested, is not to hang onto our lives otherwise we will shrivel up





## Sr Helen Prejean

When John Dear was over recently, he noticed that Sr Helen Prejean would be speaking in Scotland in October. 'You've got to see her' he said. I responded that I might prefer to see Susan Sarandon, who played her in the film *Dead Man Walking*. 'No,' said John, 'I've met Susan Sarandon and she's a great person; but Helen is truly marvellous and even more fun.'

So I sat with expectation as Fr Chris Boles, who had originally invited her several years ago, introduced this diminutive figure in a denim style jacket. She is the ideal speaker: clear, in command of her subject, powerful and without sentimentality while leavening a heavy subject with appropriate and gracious lightness.

She spoke of an upbringing of comparative privilege in Baton Rouge in a 'happy and intact family', where the culture of racial separation still held sway as being the best solution for both sides. As a religious she taught English in school and it was only on moving to the inner city of New Orleans that she experienced the deeper segregation of poverty and brokenness of society, whose effects were felt by poor whites but disproportionately by African Americans. Even first communions were segregated.

Almost by accident she was asked to write to a prisoner and found herself drawn into her life's work. The US imprisons 2.3 million of its citizens – 1 in every 100 adults. The prisoner she was writing to was on Death Row, awaiting execution; 80% of all US executions take place in the ten Southern states that supported slavery. The highest rate of incarceration is in Louisiana, where the odds of a death sentence are 97% higher for those whose victim was white than for those whose victim was black. (A very useful summary of the dire statistics on the death penalty in the US can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/yk1k7xm>)

Sr Helen spoke of her fearfulness on her first visit to the Angola State penitentiary – clanging doors and no doorknobs; and her apprehensions on coming face to face with a murderer, gratefully separated by a grille. Her guide was the words of another religious sister: 'there is no blueprint, just be a neighbour'. She found herself confronted with a spiritual dilemma in human form – we are all worth more than the worse thing we have ever done – a fact as true for each of us whether saint or murderer. It was a living example of the notion that 'there, but for the circumstances of life, might be me.' She found herself drawn by an 'awakened grace' to a very different place, as God subverts our expectations. With characteristic self deprecation she added, 'I'd really like to print Sneaky Jesus t-shirts!'

As 'spiritual advisor' Sr Helen found herself the only person allowed to be with Patrick Sonnier, the condemned man, prior to execution and she was permitted to accompany him through the terrifying and undignified process. This was the first of a number of such accompaniments which strengthened her opposition to the death penalty.

She also discovered that the system of criminal justice is arbitrary yet with a built in prejudice. It is a system that humiliates not only those who are made its objects, but also the society that legalises hatred. [Since 1973 in the US, over 140 people have been released from death row as a result of subsequent evidence which exonerates them. Currently there are about 5 exonerations every year in the US]. The notion that execution somehow brings 'closure' to the families of the victim is relatively recent, was introduced by

government and is not borne out by the evidence. Indeed the protracted nature of appeals and reopening of a case breeds false hopes for the condemned while forcing the families of victims to have the whole affair revisited publicly and healing postponed.

Indeed it was through attending these processes seeking to commute the death penalty for individuals that Sr Helen discovered what she called her 'big mistake'. She had been so focussed on the condemned man's suffering that she had 'missed' the suffering of the victim's families. It is a complementary part of the suffering of the whole unjust system, but for Sr Helen it meant a whole new dimension for her work. She founded Survive, an organisation devoted to counselling the families of victims of violence. In this, she was greatly inspired by the father of one of the victims.

At root, Sr Helen said, we have difficulty in handling deep pain; which makes it all the more important to find ways of doing so. She used the arresting image of the crucified Christ. The one arm represents the suffering of the condemned person and their family and the other arm the suffering of the victim and their family. She quoted a prison warden who said that the saddest funerals he had ever experienced were those of people who had been executed, with their irreparable sense of the failure of human relationships.

Only in dismantling the death penalty as part of any criminal justice system can that dignity be restored, not just to the victims and their families whose lives have been torn apart; not just to the duly convicted perpetrators and their families; but to the societies which have the responsibility of maintaining and upholding justice.

Thankfully attitudes are changing. In the US, the fact that states with the death penalty have seen homicide figures doubling is only one empirical observation that leads to questioning whether it has any effect. Police chiefs universally consider it the least relevant fact in combatting crime; while the cost of executions, and even more of keeping people for decades on Death Row, is enormous.

One of the areas Sr Helen touched upon was the change in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, deriving from a consistent ethic of respect for life. She herself had pointed out in an audience with Pope John Paul II, that what was at stake was not only the dignity of the innocent, but the dignity of the guilty who are also recipients of God's love and mercy.

Certainly between 1992, when the *Catechism* was issued and 1997, a textual change took place. While not excluding the death penalty, its use is qualified severely: 'Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm – without definitely taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself – the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity "are very rare, if not practically nonexistent."' *Catechism*, n2267, with the final quote from John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, (1995), n56.

Tim Duffy



Ellen and Carol with Sister Helen

## Poverty Alliance Scotland Seminars

Grace Buckley summarises some recent meetings on the crucial issue of poverty

These *Understanding Poverty* seminars were held as part of the *Challenge Poverty Week*. The first – *The Generation Game – Family, Poverty and Unemployment* – took place on 15 October in the City Halls under the chairmanship of Keith Aitken.

The first section was a series of presentations from a number of academics and researchers working in this field, with round table discussions in the afternoon followed by a panel question and answer session. Dr John Welshman of Lancaster University, who has just published a new study called *Underclass* on this topic, traced the history of the concept of an 'underclass'. He asked why this idea continues to appear in various guises over the years, despite a lack of reputable evidence, and suggested that it perhaps it is because the idea is useful to politicians as it avoids the need for any change in society and its structures.

Professor Robert MacDonald of Teesside University and Professor Tracey Shildrick of Leeds University spoke on the much publicised claim of politicians and media that there are three generations of welfare claimants who have never worked. They have carried out an in-depth eight months long research project in Teesside and Glasgow to try to prove or disprove this widespread claim, although they recognised the problems of proving a negative!

They found the idea was prevalent even among professionals who, when asked to substantiate it by examples, could not do so. Other research has in fact indicated that fewer than 0.5% of workless households may have 2 generations who have not worked, so clearly the percentage with 3 generations will be even less. Also they found that generally among workless households, the older generation had worked – in the 1960s when there was work to be had! Among the families they studied, there was a strong desire among parents for their children to have work and a better life, and the younger generation had a strong pro-work approach.

They called the 3 generation claim a 'zombie theory' which is immune to contrary evidence. They identified the problem of poverty as related to the lack of or insecurity of employment – what they described as the 'low pay – no pay cycle' which was a churn between unemployment and insecure employment. There was also a recognition that many of these families have multiple problems which impact their ability to work.

Dr Sharon Wright of the University of Stirling rounded off the morning session by taking participants through some of the facts on worklessness. For example, the number of claimants for Job Seekers Allowance is at an all-time high, and there are 5 workless people for every vacancy available. So where does that put the Government's demands that people on welfare go out and get a job? Policy trends have become increasingly harsh since the 1990s, with less to find work and more anti-welfare language.

Interviews with jobless people show that they are struggling just to get by. There are no jobs, and people are demotivated and feel devalued. Dr Wright urged that there should be an accurate, respectful public discussion of the issues, and policy changes based on authentic evidence of the lived experiences of those who are jobless.

In the afternoon panel session, a number of important points came out:

- We are not talking about the extreme cases here in our evidence simply to make a point
- We need to recognise the impact of unemployment and poverty across generations
- We need to review spending on deprived areas because it is not working. Consider what people (particularly the young) really need and get a jobs plan in place

- There is a need to counter the myths and get the media to take stories of real people and their experiences
- We need community change and more support for community activists
- Humanise the statistics!

The second seminar was held on 17 October and was entitled Tackling Food Poverty in Scotland, under the Chairmanship of Susan Archibald. There were three speakers who gave a diversity of insight into the topic, before participants broke into discussion groups and then came back together for a plenary session.

The first speaker was community activist Caroline Mockford who works with the Poverty Alliance. She suffers from a chronic illness and faces a benefit cut as a result of the 'bedroom tax'. She cannot access foodbanks. Among her challenging questions were: why is it cheaper to buy sweets and biscuits than good nutritious food in so many areas? How can people on benefits afford to cook food for themselves, given the cost of energy? She also made the point that not everyone can get access to supermarkets where food is cheaper. The cost of transport often outweighs any benefits.

Katherine Trebeck of Oxfam started with the fact that there is enough food to feed everyone in our world yet one third are malnourished and another third hungry. There are high levels of food waste. The issues are political and economic – poor distribution and a failure to share – and this is finally being recognised.

The poorest have been hardest hit by the economic crisis. There has been a decline in the availability of decent work, and the conditions loaded on to the unemployed seeking assistance are the harshest yet. Food prices in the UK have risen 12%, three times the level of the increases in other European countries. Of those seeking help at foodbanks, 65,000 are doing so because of benefits changes and 16,000 because of delays in benefits payments. There is increased inequality, with the CEOs of top companies getting 185 times the average income.

She referred to Oxfam's report *The Perfect Storm* and some of the facts there. There are over 1 million people in the UK living in food poverty – in Scotland the figure is 1 in 20! The Red Cross is giving food parcels to people in the UK. Food banks are not the safety net they are claimed to be. People are cutting down on their intake of fruit and vegetables. Health inequalities are rising. It is all down to the economy and the political responses. People are unable to live with health and dignity.

The final speaker was Peter Ritchie of Nourish Scotland, a network for local and sustainable food. He started with the point that food exports in the UK are greater than our own food use – just like a Third World country! Why is this the case, why are we so unequal and why are we not taking action? He suggested we have an oppressive food industry in the UK, where there is a great divergence between farm gate prices and retail prices.

We treat the issue of hunger and poverty as an individual problem and we still focus on the perceived incapacity of the poor. Foodbanks are not the answer to chronic malnutrition. There should be a human right to food. We should accept the need for food sovereignty – we accept this for the Global South – and there should be community cafes and food buying co-ops. And we should start with the Living Wage.

The discussion groups tried to come up with their top three priorities for a Scottish Food Poverty Strategy. A recurring theme was the need to tackle the underlying causes of food poverty and to deal with the issues at structural level, rather than just firefighting.

“Once we realize that our God is a God of peace, that we are created to dwell in God's peace here and now, that we can know deep peace within our own hearts and that we can contribute to the peace of the world, then we will turn around and start that journey of peace and stay with it for the rest of our lives.”

-John Dear, S.J.

Living Peace: A Spirituality of Contemplation and Action [New York: Doubleday, 2001 – page 227]



# Newsbrief . . . Newsbrief

**World Day of Migrants and Refugees:** On January 19, 2014, the Church will celebrate the 100th World Day of Migrants and Refugees. The theme chosen by Pope Francis is 'Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World'. In the conclusion of his Message, the Holy Father says to migrants and refugees: 'Never lose the hope that you too are facing a more secure future, that on your journey you will encounter an outstretched hand, and that you can experience fraternal solidarity and the warmth of friendship! To all of you, and to those who have devoted their lives and their efforts to helping you, I give the assurance of my prayers and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.'

**Living Wage Increases:** As part of the 2nd annual Living Wage Week, (3rd-9th November), the Scottish Living Wage Campaign and Living Wage Foundation announced that the new rate for Scotland would be £7.65 an hour. Commenting on the living wage, John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Employment said 'We are firmly of the view that employers should reward their staff fairly, which is why all public sector staff under our direct control receive at least the Scottish Living Wage rate and will do for the duration of this parliament'. As part of the Week, the STUC organised a lobby of the Scottish Parliament, which focused around the upcoming Procurement Bill. As part of the lobby, more than 30 MSPs signed a call for the Scottish Government to introduce a Living Wage Unit.

**First Fairtrade wine from Lebanon now available in the UK:** It will mean that 430 families from 11 local villages will benefit from Fairtrade premiums raised from sales. Considering that 67% of Lebanese farmers live in poverty this could be life changing for the local community.

**Your Faith, Your Finance:** is a website exploring ethical and spiritual issues around the use of money, to help you make decisions – without telling you the answers. In the midst of economic crisis and increasing poverty, there is a growing demand for resources, information, advice and ideas about banking, investing, shopping in ways that promote ethical, Spirit-led uses of money. Between them, churches, congregations and individual believers in the UK own billions of pounds. Decisions about how this money is used can have a powerful impact. [www.yourfaithyourfinance.org](http://www.yourfaithyourfinance.org)

**Conscientious Objectors' Day 2014:** Are you a descendant of a First World War conscientious objector or related to someone who was active in the women's peace movement of those days, such as Women's International League for Peace and Freedom? Peace organisations planning the International Conscientious Objectors' Day ceremony in London on 15 May 2014 would like to invite relatives to take part. If you are one, please get in touch. Contact Claire at the Network for Peace, 5 Caledonian Road, London, N1 9DY. 07794 036602 [mail@networkforpeace.org.uk](mailto:mail@networkforpeace.org.uk) [www.networkforpeace.org.uk](http://www.networkforpeace.org.uk)

**No Glory in War:** 2014 marks the hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the First World War during which more than 16 million people were killed and 20 million wounded. David Cameron has announced plans to spend £55 million on events to mark the anniversary. He has compared these to the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and described their aim as emphasising our 'national spirit'. Peace campaigners throughout the UK are calling for a different kind of commemoration and will be organising religious, cultural, political and educational activities to mark the courage of many involved in the war whilst also remembering the devastation it caused. 'No Glory in War' was launched on the 25th October. You can find out more at [www.noglory.org](http://www.noglory.org)

**Fairphone:** Dutch entrepreneurs have embarked on a social enterprise to bring the world the first ever Fairphone. The materials to be used in the phone are responsibly sourced and the company ensure good working conditions for those making the devices. They are also investing in e-waste management and other design and operating systems to ensure the product's viability in the long-term. More information <http://tinyurl.com/pzhoom2> (Scottish Fair Trade Forum)

**Fair Trade at the Commonwealth Games 2014:** A motion has been lodged at the Scottish Parliament to call for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014 to go further in their Fair Trade procurement than the 2012 London Olympics. The Glasgow 2014 Food and Drink Charter for the Commonwealth Games will be published shortly. The 2014 team has already made a commitment to Fair Trade in its sustainability policy. George Adam MSP, Co-convenor of the Cross Party Group on Fair Trade, who submitted the motion, argues that it is fitting that Fair Trade commitments exceed those during the London Olympics, as not only is Glasgow a Fair Trade city, but also Scotland has now become a Fair Trade Nation and that this would reflect well on Scotland's reputation as an outward looking nation that also has a role to play in international development. (Scottish Fair Trade Forum)

**Demand an end to 'orphanage tourism':** Tourism Concern has launched a petition calling on tour operators to stop sending tourists and volunteers to orphanages. There are still a significant number of tour operators and commercial volunteering organisations in the UK promoting volunteering at orphanages and this has to stop. Children are being separated from their families and are often forced to live in squalid institutions that masquerade as orphanages while well-meaning but misguided tourists are then invited to volunteer as 'carers' as part of a holiday experience. Looking after vulnerable children should be undertaken by local, full-time, professional staff and not by short-term volunteers, no matter how skilled or qualified. A child in an institution needs stability and long term support – not a revolving door of volunteers. Find out more and sign the petition at [www.tourismconcern.org.uk/orphanages.html](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/orphanages.html)

**Tax Campaign success:** The UK Government's decision to create a new, public register of who owns some 2.5 million companies is a welcome breakthrough in the global fight against tax evasion, corruption and other financial crime, says Christian Aid. The decision was announced by the UK Government at the London meeting of the Open Government Partnership on Thursday 31 October 2013. Christian Aid says it believes that in addition to the public register's direct benefits in the fight against tax evasion and other financial crime, it will also set a brilliant example to other countries around the world. They have been watching to see what the UK would do and are now more likely to create public registers of their own. Christine Allen, Director of Policy and Public Affairs at Christian Aid, commented: 'The UK Government should now build on its excellent decision to create a public register by leading efforts to do the same thing at European Union level. In addition, it should ensure that the UK's Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories [including many of the world's tax havens] set up equivalent public registers covering companies registered with them.'

**CND to use NATO summit in Newport to highlight opposition to alliance:** CND has reiterated its opposition to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), as it is announced that Newport in Wales will host the military alliance's 2014 summit. This is the first time that Britain will have hosted NATO leaders since the end of the cold war in 1990. Since then, say CND, thousands have died in NATO's wars in Afghanistan and Libya as the alliance ruthlessly pursues global military influence and aggressive military expansionism.

**Fairtrade Fortnight 2014:** Next year's Fairtrade Fortnight, will take place between 24 February – 9 March 2014, and will mark the launch of an exciting new stage of the Make Food Fair campaign that aims to transform the banana industry and ensure those at the sharp end of the supply chain, the millions of struggling banana farmers and workers, get a fair deal. The campaign to 'Abolish the Unfair Banana' will take all of us acting together, online and in our communities to achieve success. To achieve maximum impact, the campaign itself will be launched at the start of Fairtrade Fortnight, but you can get involved right away by visiting <http://tinyurl.com/pyu8eqs> to find out more and download your Campaign Action Guide.

**Child Poverty Action Group Scotland:** CPAG in Scotland's advice line offers free independent, expert, up-to-date advice and information to advisers in Scotland on all aspects of the benefits and tax credits systems. The advice line is for welfare rights advisers, student advisers, housing staff, health staff, family support staff, social workers, solicitors and other advisers and frontline support staff in Scotland. Unfortunately, they do not have the resources to provide direct advice to people who are claiming benefits. Members of the public wanting advice you should contact a local advice centre, law centre or welfare rights unit, where they can get face-to-face advice about your case. Call centre hours: Monday to Thursday, 10am – 4pm, Friday 10am – 12 noon 0141 552 0552 Email [advice@cpagscotland.org.uk](mailto:advice@cpagscotland.org.uk)

## Silent Night, Holy Night?

*Julia Lamb reminds us that Christmas will have another dimension for some*

**A**dvent and Christmas bring us together to celebrate the birth of Christ. We shop for presents and food; make decorations and charitable donations; attend Nativity Plays and Christmas Concerts, and enjoy the magical atmosphere created by twinkling lights and candles.

We are reminded of the difficulties in the life of Mary, a young, unwed woman who heard she was carrying the Messiah. She would have been looked upon as being outcast. We are reminded of Joseph who followed through on his promise and married this pregnant girl; he is depicted in some Nativity icons with his head in his hands in despair, wondering what he's got himself into. We can forget the humanity at the centre of our Nativity scenes in the candle glow of Midnight Mass and Christmas trees.

Then there are the adverts for toys, and the pressure from children; the lessons in having enough when others have nothing. There's the magazines showing beautiful tidy houses and fabulous food, and my house is all paper everywhere and burned turkey...the human touch!

For some, though, the burned turkey will result in assault and frightened children hiding upstairs, with big sister telling stories to little brother to keep him from crying, because they don't want to be noticed. If they are noticed, at the very least there will be harsh words, at worst there will be a punch on the head. Christmas Day will end with Dad going out in the car and not coming home until tomorrow, and Mum gathering the children round to read stories, eat chocolate and watch their favourite Disney film with a sigh of relief...if they are lucky. Dad might just be gone forever, or Mum and the children thrown out on the street. Christmas is also the peak time in the year for acts of Domestic Violence.

Chief Inspector Graham Gouldon of the Scottish National Violence Reduction Unit says: *'Domestic abuse is Scotland's national shame. The commitment of police and partners to tackling that shame is beyond doubt – only recently the Chief Constable of Scotland announced new plans to tackle domestic abuse, and organisations like Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline, Zero Tolerance, White Ribbon Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid have been relentless in placing this issue at the top of the agenda in Scotland. But while they are doing everything they can, we must remember domestic abuse is everyone's problem. If we really want to make a difference to levels of domestic abuse, we need to look at our attitudes towards relationships and what we see as acceptable.'*

And here we, as people of Faith, can make a contribution.

Cases of Domestic Abuse have been climbing year on year, partly due to women feeling more able to report the crime. But as bystanders, would we know what to do if we were asked for help?

Here are some guidelines:

### Listen

Hear her story; try to put yourself in her shoes without judgment.

### Decide

What does she want to do? Does she need a break? A place of safety? To get her children to safety? What does SHE want to do?

### Act

How can we make this happen safely? **Keep the woman and yourself safe at all times.** She may just need a supportive friend to talk to until she works out for herself the next step. She may come once, or 7 times before she leaves; she may never leave. If she goes back home encourage her to put together an emergency bag that includes passports, NHS Medical Cards, Birth Certificates, and other necessary legal documents in case she does have to leave suddenly.

She may need to find a place of safety for herself and her children. Remember it is her decision. Find out the number of your local Women's Aid and the Local Housing Authority in case she needs emergency housing.

**Note: The point that women are most vulnerable to being murdered is when they try to leave!**

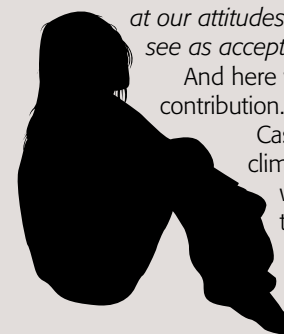
We know that 1 in 4 women will experience violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives, this means we all know someone who has experienced this. Add this to women with children and the impact becomes much greater. For many of us we want to help, but don't know what to do; for some of us we are afraid to get involved, but, as communities of Faith, there are very simple things we can do to support people experiencing Domestic Abuse especially within our communities,

- The most obvious is to include the Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline number in our newsletters and on our noticeboards: 0800 027 1234
- We can ensure that prayers are included for those experiencing Domestic Abuse to help them understand they are not to blame; the fault lies with the perpetrator.
- If you think someone in your place of worship might be perpetrating or condoning domestic abuse, challenge this. Advice is available from The White Ribbon in Scotland campaign. [www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk](http://www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk)

There is useful information and links for Faith Communities at

[www.togetherwecanstopit.org/10-things-faith-communities-can-do/](http://www.togetherwecanstopit.org/10-things-faith-communities-can-do/)

I hope you will find yourself able to offer as much or as little as you can. For someone the little you do may mean the world to them.





# diary



## DECEMBER

- 18 International Migrants Day
- 20 International Human Solidarity Day
- 25 Christmas Day – Joy to the World!
- 28 Holy Innocents

## JANUARY

- 3 First loans by the Grameen Bank (1977)
- 5 Feast of the Epiphany Justice and Peace letter to be read in all parishes
- 10 1946: First UN General Assembly opens with 51 nations represented
- 19 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2014
- 24 Start of Fairtrade Fortnight
- 25 Start of Poverty and Homelessness Action Week
- 27 UN International Day of Commemoration for Victims of the Holocaust
- 30 1948: Mahatma Gandhi assassinated

## FEBRUARY

- 2 World Wetland Day
- 11 Nelson Mandela released from prison 1990
- 12 2005: Murder of Sr. Dorothy Stang SND in Brazil
- 20 UN World Day of Social Justice
- 24 Start of Fairtrade Fortnight
- 21 UN International Mother Language Day



*“As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.”*

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013)

## MARCH

- 1 International Death Penalty Abolition Day
- 1 1999: International Treaty to Ban Landmines becomes effective
- 8 International Women’s Day
- 15 World Consumer Rights Day
- 21 UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 21 World Forestry Day
- 21 World Meteorological Day
- 22 World Water Day
- 24 1980: Assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero

Full details and links on the events page of our website [www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk/EventsDiary.aspx](http://www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk/EventsDiary.aspx)

Our Office: 65 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 2BX. Tel/Fax: 0141 333 0238

Email: [office@justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk](mailto:office@justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk) [www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk](http://www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk)

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Bishop President – Bishop Peter Moran | Chair – Ellen Charlton  
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 Magazine Design – Linsey Wilson  
 Office Volunteers – Maria Madill & Sr. Agnes Bradley

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