



Scottish Catholic Justice and Peace Commission
Annual Report 2009-10

Justice and Peace Commission Report 2009-10

‘Therefore walk in the way of the good,
and keep to the paths of the just.’

Proverbs 2:22

(Sections I and IV with the conclusion constitute a summary report.)

I: The Last Year: An Overview

1. The last year has seen a consolidation as the new members of the Standing Committee worked together organising events and carrying forward the Commission priorities. A good working relationship has developed with our President Bishop Peter who, despite the obstacles of distance and illness, has made himself readily accessible. The Chair (Ellen Charlton) and the research worker (Tim Duffy) have made several briefing visits to Aberdeen which have been mutually beneficial. We are grateful for his support.
2. A change of office bearers usually brings a change of emphasis along with the necessary continuity. It is fortunate, in the absence of a National Secretary, that the Chair is available to carry out responsibilities beyond her own. Staff, the Standing Committee and the Commission have expressed their satisfaction with this arrangement, while realising that it cannot be indefinite.
3. The quarterly meetings of the Commission are our major forum for examining policy. A recent refinement has been the limiting of business to the morning session of the quarterly meeting. This leaves the afternoon free for a talk or reflection often with input from an outside agency, along with a chance for Commission members to exchange views and get to know each other better on the four occasions annually that they get together. We are also endeavouring to put in place a calendar of diocesan activities. Quarterly meetings are now more productive and enjoyable.
4. Our priorities remain pressing social problems:
 - Asylum – particularly the detention of children in Dungavel, but also general issues surrounding deportation
 - Trident – which remains the focus of an ideology of force
 - Poverty in Scotland – a fundamental concern, the more so since it is increasing

- Climate Change – a crucial concern, receiving growing interest in Catholic Social Teaching, through Pope Benedict.
5. The SCIAF funded joint J&P and Craighead Institute course on social and pastoral ministry is now gearing up for its third and final intake. Grace Buckley, the vice Chair and Tim, research officer, represent the Commission in the joint work with the Craighead Institute. By Easter 2011, there will be over 50 people who have done the course, including the majority of the Commission. This gives us a well trained cadre of people to take the message of social justice undergirded by a sound Ignatian Spirituality into the dioceses.
 6. The outreach of the Commission is through the magazine, the website, the regular and almost daily information communicated from the J & P office by e-mail and our representation at meetings of related bodies and organisations. The magazine continues to flourish as a means of informing, discussing and reflecting on the issues of justice and peace in relation to the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. The website offers more space for almost immediate comment on issues of interest; as well as a permanent and accessible source of related information. Extending and archiving the website will be a focus of work in the near future.
 7. Finance: In common with other commissions, the majority of financial responsibilities have transferred to the Bishops' Conference Financial Officer. We are grateful for her diligent and efficient discharge of these duties and for the advice and consultation she has offered.

II: Priorities:

1. Asylum and refugees continues to be a well supported issue, eg at Dungavel Gatherings, during Refugee Week and responding in support of deportees. It is a focus of work in the Craighead course which has produced some excellent social analysis. The particular emphasis, dating back to Bishop Mone, of actively criticising the policy of detaining children of asylum seekers, particularly in Dungavel, contrary to international agreement, has continued. It is important to maintain this priority as times of economic recession lead to a tendency to find scapegoats, particularly among foreign migrants.
2. Much has been said about Trident, both by our own Scottish bishops and by the developing teaching from the Vatican. The statements of the Scottish Bishops remain a reference point of which we can be justly proud. Members of the Commission continue to attend conferences, rallies and we have a representative on *Scotland's for Peace*. Economic recession may lead to reductions in the areas of nuclear weapons. It remains part of a wider militaristic and imperialistic mentality which the UK government pursues despite the fact that it is outmoded and unsuited for the challenges to peace in

our world. Trident remains a reality and one which must be constantly challenged.

3. About 17% of Scots were living in poverty before the recession. UK public sector net debt, expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), was 59.9 per cent at the end of January 2010 (£845.8 billion). Total UK personal debt at the end of December 2009 stood at £1,460bn – more than the national GDP. Almost 2,000 people are made redundant daily in the UK. Scottish official unemployment figures for January are up to almost 145,000. There is a need to see this in the perspective of Pope John Paul II, who said that ‘work is a key, perhaps the key, to the whole social question’. Work as a means of social and spiritual fulfillment within the context of the common good is still far from being the norm.
4. Climate Change: We are represented on Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, and submitted comment towards the Scottish Climate Change Bill. Economic recession is unlikely to produce or underwrite sustainable policies. If we fail to take relatively expensive but necessary precautions to confront the problems of climate change while we can, we are likely to be locked in to the irreversible and increasingly catastrophic consequences of global warming. Environmentally, as well as economically, we are living on borrowed time. The churches have a unique capacity here for leadership, which has been exemplified by recent pronouncements by Pope Benedict. The powerful letter of Bishop Moran for Epiphany 2010 has received favourable mention and is being used as the basis of a diocesan campaign to encourage involvement with the Eco congregation project.

III: The Last Year: Examples

1. In November 2009 the government decided to replace the vouchers given to those whose asylum appeal had failed with a special card, which would supposedly have a wider range of places where it could be used, and remove any stigma that attached to using vouchers. The new Azure card has been introduced without a proper pilot and with minimal parliamentary scrutiny. It will also be expensive to introduce - costing £200,000 a year just to administer; and it costs £2 extra per week per person just to give £35 as a cash substitute. National Office staff Tim Duffy and Carol Clarke acted as monitors on a trial run organised by the group Citizens for Sanctuary, which showed how unprepared even approved outlets were. As a result of a critical report, the head of the Borders Agency has agreed to a meeting in March which Tim Duffy has been asked to chair.
2. We initiated a meeting with Fr Keegans of Ayr, who had approached the bishops earlier in 2009 for support on a new campaign to release Abdelbaset

Ali Mohamed Al Megrahi, the man imprisoned for the Lockerbie bombing. Fr Keegans was the priest in Lockerbie at the time: he has followed the case and is convinced that Mr Megrahi is innocent. Tim Duffy attended a private screening of a documentary arguing the unsafe nature of the conviction. Meetings with Fr Keegans and with Dr Jim Swire resulted in an article in the magazine.

3. Successful meetings with the Commission for Social and Pastoral Care have led to a clarification of the relationship with Justice and Peace. These meetings also opened up the possibility of shared work in the area of disability and supported needs for example, which might use the complementary perspectives.
4. Rev Dr Graham Blount is currently post doctoral fellow at the University of Edinburgh. He is carrying out research on the kind of theological understanding that underlies Christian groups working in the area of poverty. One of his reference groups which has met with him several times is composed largely of Motherwell Core Group J&P members.
5. We have been renewing and developing better contacts with the European Justice and Peace Commission. The Secretary and depute Secretary (two French Dominicans) visited in July 2009. We accepted the subsequent invitation to attend the European Conference of Commissions in Seville in September. Our Chair Ellen ended up as part of the committee drafting the final statement (see Appendix 1). We are looking at ways to absorb these European initiatives into the domestic agenda in Scotland. As a result of our new relationship, we were asked (admittedly at short notice in December) to arrange a meeting of the Executive Committee of the European Commission in Scotland. This was duly arranged in the Heriot Watt University campus outside Edinburgh (unfortunately during the period of the Scottish Bishops' *ad limina*). The meeting was a success and there was a period built in to meet and discuss with representatives of the Scottish Commission. European commissions are quite fascinated with the way Justice and Peace in Scotland operates as a bottom up affair from parish groups, through diocesan core groups to National Commission.
6. Grace Buckley, our vice Chair and a lawyer, carried out an extensive revision and overhaul of the Constitution and Standing Orders, to take account of the existing situation in the Commission without closing the door on possible future developments.
7. In the run up to the Copenhagen Climate Summit, the Commission took an active role in the Wave campaign which mobilised a great many people on an issue where there was a large measure of popular agreement. Failure to reverse the propoganda of climate change sceptics is a major concern, as is

the nationalist politics exemplified by the Copenhagen summit. Fluctuations in poll figures suggest the public grasp of the issue of climate change is led more by marketing than by understanding. Certainly the moral and spiritual dimensions necessary for a proper understanding of creation remain a proper and valuable contribution of the churches.

8. A major effort was put into the Justice and Peace Conference in September. Through the good offices of our Argyll and the Isles representative Fr Roddy Johnston, we were able to obtain Charles Kennedy as our keynote speaker. His talk on the place of faith in his political experience was ably delivered and well received. In a new departure the afternoon was given over to political cabaret: songs by the folk singer Ian Davison, reminding us of the power of music to enhance a social message.

IV: Future Developments:

1. Much of the work of the National Commission has been to look at issues on a national scale. There is currently discussion about how we may cooperate with dioceses and parishes (observing due subsidiarity) to encourage and resource more local initiatives. The Eco congregation project is an obvious example. Another might be micro credit or credit union formation fleshing out the suggestion in *Caritas in Veritate*, n45. Yet another might be to introduce elements of the Christian tradition of non violence for local groups.
2. Part of the agreement in the joint course with Craighead is that trainees should be identified who will in their turn be able after training to deliver the course and broaden the awareness and formation of justice and peace supporters through these local initiatives. Trainees are only identified after the final module (and subject to their availability and agreement) but we would hope to see that aspect of the course providing local resources.
3. The forthcoming election will again highlight the shallow and unprincipled nature of contemporary party politics. Policies and pledges will be subject to the arithmetic of perceived gain, which does not scruple to court the church constituency with apparently congenial views. The bishops, as Cardinal O'Brien recently demonstrated, are not taken in by these attempts. Indeed many of the reserved issues on which Scots will vote, such as economic policy, defence, foreign affairs and family and bioethical issues fall far short of the norms of Catholic Social Teaching. A useful reflection for the election is to be found in the recent statement issued by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales under the title of "Towards the Common Good". The Catholic voter is nevertheless obliged to find the most conscientious option among parties that are all defective in a number of areas.

A Google search for '*discerning the signs of the times*' will throw up items originating with Reinhold Niebuhr, Vatican II and Rev Ian Paisley among others. This suggests

we need to be clear about the base for our discernment. The tradition of Catholic Social Teaching gives us not only such a base, but a developing tool for confronting a world increasingly hostile to religious faith and transcendence. This tradition empowers us, as the opening sentences of *Gaudium et Spes* explain, to hear the resonance of the 'joys and the hopes' and also 'the griefs and the anxieties' not just of Christians, but of the whole of humanity. Christ's desire that we should experience 'life in all its fullness' is not comfort for some at the expense of others; but rather the root of that principle we call the 'common good'. That remains the vision of Justice and Peace and we are grateful to the Bishops' Conference for the support and encouragement they offer.

Appendix:

Declaration



Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions

APPENDIX 1

“Which Are the Frontiers of Solidarity in Europe?”

We, of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions of the Catholic Church, representing 25 European countries, accepted an invitation from the Spanish Justice and Peace Commission, and H.E. Cardinal Carlos Amigo Vallejo of Seville, to come to Seville from 18th to 22nd September 2009, to hold our General Assembly and an International Workshop on the theme: “Which are the frontiers of solidarity in Europe?”

The theme of solidarity takes on particular significance in the context of our increasingly globalized world. Unsurprisingly, globalization and the issues arising from this phenomenon featured prominently in Pope Benedict XVI’s latest Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, in which he pointed out that: “As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers” (No. 19).

In Seville we have had the opportunity to examine the challenges to solidarity – political, social, cultural and economic – on both a national and international level. The experience we have shared here have given us a renewed sense of our responsibilities – as individuals, as Europeans, and as a Church – to take action to address the challenges and take down the barriers blocking solidarity.

Pope John Paul II told us that “human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question” (*Laborem Exercens*, 3). *Caritas in Veritate* also states that this work should be “decent” (No. 63). The experience of this workshop has confirmed us in this view. A meeting with the staff of *Forja 21*, an NGO that provides support for young people seeking employment, highlighted the importance of addressing the problem of youth unemployment – a serious concern in many European countries at the present time. We need to invest in the young people, who are our future, facilitating their access to employment, which will enable them to participate in our society and reach their full potential. The significance of unemployment as a barrier to participation needs to be recognised.

A visit to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta on the Moroccan coast allowed us to learn more about the human dimension of the challenges arising from migration – a phenomenon closely linked to globalization and also intimately connected to the problem of unemployment. The 600 migrants currently stranded in Ceuta as they await a legal resolution of their residency status, a process that can take up to three years – if they have not been deported before this – are, for the most part, young people willing and eager to work, and yet they are prevented from doing so. Forced to flee their homes as a result of violence and/or unemployment and/or extreme poverty, they have undertaken a long and perilous journey to get to Europe in search of work and a better life. Instead, they find themselves confined at the margins of European society, with their freedoms severely limited, unable to participate, contribute, or make choices about their future. In fact, some of these young people told us simply: ‘We have no future’. Solidarity demands that we do all we can to give these people something to aim for.

The huge double-fences, topped with barbed wire, that divide the city of Ceuta from the rest of the African continent, are a powerful visual representation of a fear that seeks to keep those in need as far from our doors as possible. We all felt a

shared sense of responsibility for this wall – part-financed by the European Union. We have taken down the Berlin wall twenty year ago and we have erected other walls elsewhere.

On the shore of Algeciras the representatives of the Justice and Peace commissions, together with the representatives of the local church and wider community, shared a moment of prayer for all the people who had lost their lives in their quest to come to Europe.

Social exclusion, fear and insecurity were evident also in our visit to the *Polígono Sur* neighbourhood, which served to highlight the links between poverty and violence. Faced with the problem of violence in our society, it is tempting to retreat behind thicker walls, higher fences and closed neighbourhoods. As a long-term solution, however, this will not work. What is needed is an active response, founded on solidarity that addresses the root causes of this violence – unemployment, poverty, social exclusion. The visit ended on a note of hope as we saw signs that such measures are already beginning to take shape in the form of the ‘participative social action plan’ currently being implemented in the neighbourhood with the active participation by the residents.

A visit to *Sevilla Acoge* (Seville offers a Welcome), the first organisation established in Spain to provide support to migrants and promote their integration into the local community, showed a powerful example of people who saw a need and are doing all they can to meet it. This is achieved through networking and committed social work input. The work of this organisation serves to remind us that true solidarity demands respect for cultural diversity in a spirit of hospitality.

The problems we examined in the International Workshop are manifold and complex, requiring solutions in both the short-term for those in our society who are experiencing poverty, unemployment and exclusion at the moment, and long-term aimed at addressing the structural causes. This includes recognition that we cannot distance ourselves from the political, social and economic problems of the African countries. Through this experience we were also able to broaden our understanding of effective and real solidarity, including its ethical and spiritual dimensions and the need for personal commitment on the part of all those involved. Hence, solidarity will

enable us to reshape barriers into meeting places where we can meet as brothers and sisters.

We wish to conclude by thanking the Spanish Commission for Justice and Peace, H.E. Cardinal Amigo of Seville, Bishop Antonio Ceballo of Cadiz y Ceuta, and all those who welcomed us during this international workshop, which has reaffirmed us in our Christian responsibility to care for the most vulnerable, on local, national and international level, because for the Church no one is a stranger.

Seville (Spain)

September the 22nd 2009