

**Commission for
Justice and Social Responsibility**

Inaugural Conference

**Catholic Social Teaching
and its impact on the wider
community**

**Guest Speaker
Neil Jameson**

**Saturday
24th February 2007**

**Cathedral Parish Hall
Brentwood
10.30am to 3.30pm**

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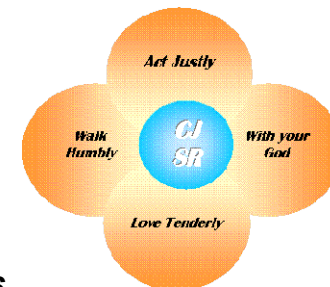
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*Commission for Justice
and Social Responsibility*



Issue 1 November 2006

In this issue...

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

Matthew 25: 31-36

Foreword by Bishop Thomas

It gives me great pleasure to extend my good wishes and support to the new Commission for Justice & Social Responsibility.

Their key areas of work, Justice & Peace, Marriage and family life, One world - One people and Pastoral care, embraces the very essence of Catholic Social Teaching and how this impacts on our daily lives.

I know, like me, you will keep everyone engaged in this work in your prayers and look forward to following the progress of their work in future newsletters.

Thomas McMahon
Bishop of Brentwood

Mrs A and her three children moved out of their home to live in a Refuge for six weeks. The mother was the subject of domestic violence and this was witnessed by the three children aged 12, 11 and 8. The father is an alcoholic and lost his job. The parents were unable to pay the bills including the mortgage and soon found themselves in serious financial difficulties. The house has been repossessed by the Building Society. Mrs A and the children are living with her parents and Mr A is living with a friend. Due to the debts this family will be unable to pay for any private rented accommodation. They are currently on the waiting list for Council property which may mean that the children will have to go to different schools.

The Brentwood Catholic Children’s Society are supporting this family and sadly this is one of several cases in which the children and their mothers have had to leave their home and seek accommodation in a refuge due to domestic violence incidents associated with either drugs or alcohol abuse.

There will be room at the inn!

This Christmas around one hundred guests will be offered transport to a church service and afterwards sit down to a full Christmas lunch followed by entertainment and tea. The afternoon will end with a short carol service. All this will happen on Christmas Day in the Methodist Church, Highams Park.

Christmas Inn which is run by Care Highams Park was set up over eleven years ago and each year about 50 or so volunteers give up their Christmas to help, elderly, disabled and housebound people to enjoy theirs. It starts in October with all the invitations and appeals for help going out. Helpers give up Christmas Eve and Christmas Day to arrange the church and prepare and serve the meal. Drivers give up time to bring people from as a field as Leyton and Woodford Green and then to take them home afterwards. It is a major commitment for those who get involved and it is hard work.

Is it worth it? Yes, every year they receive letters of thanks from the guests who if it hadn't been for Christmas Inn would have spent a very lonely day. One very simple letter summed it up perfectly. It just said, 'Thank you for caring.'

Elisabeth Abbott
Care Highams Park

Introduction

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this first edition of the newsletter for the new Commission for Justice and Social Responsibility.

Our work will continue to build on the foundations of previous commissions and sadly you only have to pick up a newspaper or hear the news to know that the need is now even more prevalent. The work of the Commission is wide ranging and goes to the very heart of Catholic Social Teaching.

I hope that you will find this first issue stimulating and informative. The work of the Commission is dependant on your active support and, most importantly, your prayers.

Phil Butcher
Director

... I was a stranger and you made me welcome ...

While visiting New York many years ago these words from Matthew, (25:35) flooded into my head.

I had attended Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral fairly early on a beautiful, freezing cold sunny Sunday morning and was returning to my hotel, just a few blocks from the Cathedral. As it was early there were very few people about and I was anxious to get back into the warm and tuck into a hearty breakfast.

As I crossed the road I was aware of, what I thought, was a pile of rubbish in black plastic bags. It wasn't until I was almost on top of this "rubbish" that I saw a face looking out at me. I bent down in horror and, sure enough it was a black woman, encased in two black bags with just her head and one arm protruding out. She could hardly speak and just wanted money for a hot drink. Her face was just like a skeleton and her arm a stick, I was sure she had Aids.

I tried to explain to her, as I knelt beside her, that I hadn't any money on me (unfortunately, I had only brought out enough dollars to put in the church plate). I told her my hotel was just round the corner and I would be back in five minutes – I will never forget the despairing look of unbelief on her face as I left.

I ran back to the hotel, grabbed my purse and a couple of sweaters and ran back to her – but she had gone. I cannot imagine how she was able to walk she appeared to be so weak.

That experience has always remained with me. It was very bizarre that I should have such an encounter at that time, especially as I had only joined the Justice & Peace Commission a few months earlier, and was finding it difficult to understand what J&P embraced. Well, after that experience in New York I had no doubts.

Davina Bolt

Sometimes it is the poorest of the poor that take them in. I know one family M, who has 2 bedrooms and 2 small children. They share their house with a family X who are afraid to return to their country. X and his wife have 2 small children age 1 year and 2 years who are living in a small room in this friends house

We provide them with some non perishable food that is donated to us by schools and churches and with some fresh fruit and vegetables.

Sr Mary Barrow

(Sr Mary works with the "Community Renewal Project" in Newham. It is an ecumenical refugee and migrant project which provides an advocacy and advice service (with specific training on many things from helping to obtain legal services through to filling in forms for housing benefit etc).

Danbury supports the homeless

The Justice & Peace Group in the parish of English Martyrs, Danbury locally supports the homeless by collecting surplus food from Marks & Spencer twice a week, and delivering it to CHESS (Churches Homeless Emergency Support Scheme) for the homeless of Chelmsford. The Group also organised an autumn concert which raised £1,500 for CHESS and Bar'N'Bus.

Homelessness among asylum seekers and refugees.

The Refugee and Migrant Project (RAMP) is a charitable organisation in Newham that reaches out to refugees, asylum seekers and any migrants. We offer **advocacy and support** to many enabling them to settle in the country and integrate. Some of the people who come to us are those without papers who have no recourse to any support or accommodation.

We are able, through the generosity of schools and churches and individuals to offer weekly food parcels. “**Our Food for a Penny**” project providing fresh food and vegetable for those without any support. The funding for this project is coming to an end so we are busy fund raising.

“**Spare Room**” is another project of RAMP but is looking to set up its own survival fund.

RAMP has also a very active **mentoring project** whereby refugees are trained to befriend and help newcomers to this country.

We also run an **Art Therapy** group helping young children who have been traumatised by their experiences as refugees.

Sadly our **Young Refugee Service** providing after school activities has had to cease owing to lack of funding.

Asylum seekers on the whole are provided with accommodation. This is allocated to them by NASS 9 National Asylum Seekers Support. It is mixed in its suitability but it is accommodation and NASS pay for it.

Failed asylum seekers and there are many in Newham, are not provided with any accommodation or support. Many of them cannot return to their country because it is not safe. Others choose not to return. They have no support and are not allowed to work. They sleep rough or on the floor in a friend's house. They move round from friend to friend.

Serving the Homeless

Serving the Homeless was founded in the early 90's by members from 5 Leigh Churches – St. Barnabas, St. Margaret's, Our Lady of Lourdes, Highlands Methodist and New Road Methodist Churches. Last year a 6th church St. Clements, joined the charity. Its aims are to help young homeless people find good accommodation. At their first meeting they committed themselves to raising £100,000 in the first year. Serving the Homeless is solely a fundraising charity. The money is raised by various activities, all of which are supported by friends and members of the churches. There is also a 200 Club where members donate a monthly sum and in return a draw takes place 4 times a year and cash prizes are awarded.

Serving the Homeless has bought 13 units of accommodation, some in conjunction with Acorn Housing Association, another local charity. When purchased properties are repaired and furnished and then handed over to Acorn who not only manage them, but also supply counselling and advice to the clients.

Because of the spiralling cost of housing in the area Serving the Homeless decided that investing large sums of money in one unit was not the best way of serving the homeless. They decided to concentrate on raising enough money to buy the property which houses the Valkyrie Road Day Centre. This is a drop-in centre and each year 20,000 clients are dealt with. Last year £70,000 was handed over to HARP (the Homeless Action Resource Project) to enable them to purchase the site. Now that they own the property they are able to access funding from charities and develop the site themselves.

Eileen Cottrell

What are we called to do? "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; When you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" (Isaiah 58:7)

Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
in hostels, temporary homes,
alone on a park bench.

Hallowed be your name
hallowed by your tenderness
for all your people.

Your kingdom come
to those who hunger for righteousness,
to those who thirst for justice.

Your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven, by those with political power
and moral influence,
by those who stand alongside your wounded people.

Give us this day our daily bread
to share with our sisters and brothers.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive
those who sin against us,
our fear of risk, of loss, of sharing our wealth,
our reluctance to follow where Christ leads.

Lead us not into temptation
into pride, into self-righteousness;
into denial of truth.

But deliver us from evil
that prevents us from taking responsibility for the housing crisis.

For yours is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory
your people, your city, your land,
your glory which will transform us all.
for ever and ever. Amen.

(Adapted from 171 in Trampled Vineyard)

A Franciscan blessing

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers,
half truths and superficial relationships
so that we may live deep within your heart.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression,
and exploitation of people
so that we may work for justice freedom and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed
for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war
so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them
and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe
that we can make a difference in this world
so that we can do what others claim cannot be done.
Amen

In your house

Father, in your house there is room enough for everyone.
We pray for those who live crowded into shanties
with paper-thin walls, corrugated iron roofs,
no clean water, no electricity, no hope.

We pray for families who are squeezed into one inadequate
room; refugees in tents, cold in winter, hot in summer;
young people in night shelters, lonely and apprehensive.

We pray for people who sleep rough in all weather.
Father, this was not your intention.

It is we who allow this to happen to your people.

It is we who must arm ourselves with your courage,
love and compassion, so that we can build the Kingdom of hope
where people can live in dignity, comfort and security.

In your holy name.
Amen

Barbara D'Arcy

(Reflections taken from Housing Justice 2006)