

A JUST WAGE? COURAGE IS WHAT IS NEEDED

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While many injustices have been brought to light and laid bare in front of us during this Covid-19 pandemic, the role of front-line workers is perhaps one of the most prominent. Whether we are watching the news, reading updates on social media, or just doing our weekly shopping for essential supplies, it is clear that those jobs which may for some have been somewhat hidden from view or deemed of a 'lesser value' in society are the ones which we are currently relying on most. The NHS doctors, nurses and carers, delivery men and women, bus drivers, shop assistants and cleaners are among those whose roles are key to maintaining so many services in the community at this unprecedented time.

Many are asking how we might be able to thank these key workers in due course – and when the pandemic subsides – and whether, for example, a tax holiday might be the way to show our appreciation. Others have taken to the streets each Thursday evening to clap for the NHS and to show solidarity with these key services which we have been advised will not cope without our cooperation and support both on an individual and a collective basis. But deep down we know that this is just not enough.

More needs to be done not only to recognise the service that cleaners, shop assistants and other low paid workers are doing for our communities at present and the question of how much they get paid has become a question that is now clearly on the agenda not for those who have been campaigning for the living wage for quite some time but for everyone who now finally sees the significance of this kind of work.



Many Catholics will be familiar with the Church's teaching on the just wage – and have equated it with what might be more commonly known as the living wage – but it is useful to remind ourselves that this is not calculated merely on the basis of a fixed amount that is due to a person by way of compensating them for work done and tasks achieved. Rather, in the Catholic tradition, it is inextricably linked with human dignity and furthermore it is a question that Pope John II argued in *Laborem Exercens* (1981) should always be on the social agenda. The question of work should never be taken off the table, especially since fresh questions regarding work are constantly emerging be it about wages, about conditions, about how we are valued or not, and ultimately about how and whether our work supports our life and our ability to live a fulfilled life and to participate in society.

Grounded in the teachings of Pope Leo XII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the introductory sections of *Laborem Exercens* state that 'the Church considers it her task always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to help to guide the above-mentioned changes so as to ensure authentic progress by man and society'. Furthermore, paragraph two makes it clear that work has a '*value of its own*' but it does so in so far as it is a human being that carries it out (LE #2).

These concepts build upon *Rerum Novarum's* attempt to say how workers should be remunerated and how we ought to view the right to private property for example, but key to understanding how workers should be treated is again the principle of dignity.



Although human dignity is a difficult concept to pin down, as human persons we instinctively know when our dignity is not being respected, or when we are expected to accept conditions for work or indeed for life that are less than an adequate reflection of our work and our contribution to a business or organisation. This concept of dignity came out very strongly in a Living Wage Campaign event held in Leeds this year where a member of the catering staff from Leeds Trinity spoke powerfully about how the living wage had improved her life and prevented her from going into debt. This living testimony moved everyone in the room to highlight again why this kind of campaign work is so important: it helps people in low paid jobs to live with dignity, to get remunerated properly for what they do and to be appreciated for the contribution they are making to our organisations and our society. Of course, no person at this meeting could have known that a few months later we would all be in lock down with many of our low paid workers continuing to serve our communities with dedication, bravery and commitment to their work – putting themselves at risk every day for the good of their families and for the common good.

Amongst others, trade unions are speaking out on behalf of these workers and the Church fully supports this. Membership of a union – as is outlined in *Laborem Exercens* - is one way to show solidarity and to help to campaign for more just wages and working conditions but more fundamentally we need to dig deeper and see that those who are keeping our society working right now – and who were perhaps hidden from some until this crisis – need to be remunerated properly as a failure to do so would be a failure to respect their human dignity.

Hence the concept of paying a just and fair (living) wage that allows people to live with dignity and to participate fully in society is a matter of social justice.

But the Church's teachings on work do not stop here: the concept of a family wage is also a feature of the social teachings. *Rerum Novarum* for instance suggests that a 'family wage' is what is needed for a man to support his family and his spouse while *Quadragesimo Anno* (#71) points out that '*every effort must [...] be made that fathers of families receive a wage large enough to meet ordinary family needs adequately*'.

Although questions can be raised here about gender equality within families, the concept of a family wage is an interesting one. Paying a wage that genuinely reflects the living costs of a family is an important consideration for any discussion on work.

This is again highlighted in Pope Francis' recent letter to popular movements and community organisations who are working tirelessly to ensure that the marginalised are remembered in our communities and are paid a universal basic wage. Although there has been much discussion about what the Pope means by a universal basic wage, it is clear that he wants to acknowledge their basic right to have security but also to thank them for what they are teaching us on a human level. He addresses them directly saying: '*You do not resign yourselves to complaining: you roll up your sleeves and keep working for your families, your communities and the common good. Your resilience helps me, challenges me, and teaches me a great deal*'

You can read the full text by following this link

<https://tinyurl.com/yauzgl3u>

Although discussions on a just, fair, family, and/or living wage have long been on the Church's social agenda, in today's context we are invited to return to them and to stress again that in spite of discussions about how the living wage or a universal basic wage might work in practice, the concept of human dignity is a guiding principle in the discussions.

So, just as Pope Francis describes those who are campaigning for the homeless and those with no job security as people who are rolling up their sleeves without complaining, let's roll up our sleeves too – in whatever capacity that we can in the work that we do – to recognise those who are underpaid, undervalued and yet essential to who we are now amidst this pandemic.



Dr Ann Marie Mealey has taught ethics at Leeds Trinity University for 14 years. She leads the Philosophy, Ethics and Religion programme.

*She is the author of *The Identity of Christian Morality* (2009) and editor-in-chief of *Perspectives in Social Justice* (2018). She has also written on environmental ethics, Catholic Social Teaching and social justice from a faith perspective.*

Let's be courageous and speak out about the need for human dignity to be respected in multiple contexts and get involved in campaigns that have grown out of a drive to protect this dignity and enable everyone to enjoy the fruits of their own hard work.

As Pope Francis points out in his book of reflections on *Happiness in This Life* (2017), if we are to create a more just society, we need courage. 'It is a time for courage, even though having courage does not mean having a guarantee of success. Courage is required of us to fight, not necessarily to win, to proclaim, not necessarily to convert. Courage is required of us to be alternative in the world, but without becoming polemical or aggressive. [...] Today is a time for courage! Today courage is needed! (pg. 16-17)



More recently, Ann Marie has been promoted to Senior Teaching Fellow and is the programme co-ordinator for the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education at Leeds Trinity. She is also the institutional lead for Fellowship applications

Ann Marie is the co-chair of Leeds Citizens, and is actively involved in promoting the Living Wage campaign across the city of Leeds and beyond. Ann Marie is also a member of the J&P Leeds Commission.

J&P LEEDS CLIMATE CRISIS ACTION GROUP

By Helen Hayden

On 28th March 2020 the Justice and Peace Leeds Climate Change Action Group met for the first time. The result was an ambitious plan to take the challenge of fighting Climate Change to parishes throughout the Diocese of Leeds. Keith Pitcher talked to us about the experience of Parish of St John Fisher & St Thomas More, Burley in Wharfedale

He explained how the parish of St John Fisher and St Thomas More had started to look at how they could reduce the carbon footprint of both the parish and at home.

At each Mass over one weekend a summary was given of Pope Francis' 'Laudato Si' encyclical, our need to respond to this, and parishioners were asked for suggestions on how we could tackle the carbon footprint of the parish, at home and in the community. There were around 380 suggestions, and these were divided into 3 categories; Gardening/food, The 'Rs' (reduce, reuse, recycle) and Campaigning.

Posters and a website were developed although a lot of this work has had to be put on hold during the Coronavirus restrictions.

This project will be a follow up to both highlight the policy within a parish / parish cluster context and to take the opportunity to promote some of the key ideas in Laudato Si and Catholic Teaching in respect of Care of Creation and relate these to the environment policy and possible actions that could be taken at a parish level



Having heard the inspirational work, which was started in Burley in Wharfedale, the group discussed ideas of J&P Leeds could facilitate a way of sharing this good practice across the diocese. It would need to be a scheme which was accessible to every parish and one which could be adapted to the very different needs and strengths of the wide variety of parishes in the Leeds diocese which range from inner city to rural, large to small with varying demographics.

The Climate Crisis Action Group decided on a project based on the Poverty workshops developed last year to tackle the causes of poverty.

The main aspect to this project is the development of a workshop set that can be adapted to use in different parish settings. It will be flexible enough to be done as 4 individual workshops or two half day workshops. The workshops would explore Catholic Social Teaching about care of the environment with particular reference to Laudato Si.



Integral to the workshops will be an exercise for the parish to evaluate the carbon footprint of their parish. The workshop set will conclude with an action planning session – exploring what else could be done within the parish

The current restrictions due to Covid 19 mean that this is a project to be pursued in future months and it seems a disappointing not to be able to make progress, however parishes will be able to build on the experiences of people and communities during this crisis. We have all made drastic changes to how we live our lives from working at home to only going out for specific reasons and learning new skills. Most people have now had experience of living in a more sustainable way.

There is growing evidence of improvements to air quality, anecdotal evidence people appreciating nature and birdsong being particularly audible, cooking more and wasting less. This is not to forget about the suffering many people have experienced especially the poorest and most vulnerable, we can though build upon these environmental benefits and improve life for everyone in our communities.

This project was discussed at the Commission meeting on the 21st April 2020, it was well received by members of the Commission. Permission was given for the Action Group to pursue funding for this project which can be started now. The Climate Crisis Action Group will meet again to discuss the way forward please see below if you would like to join please get in touch, details below.

ISSUE ACTION GROUPS – HELP US DISCERN THE ACTIONS TO TAKE TO RESPOND TO THE ‘SIGNS OF THE TIMES’

As reported earlier this year, the Commission has set up 3 Issue Action Groups to help us decide what actions we can take on our key priority areas

Peace & Nonviolence

The Commission agreed that for the next 12 months at least this group would focus on the Israel Palestine situation and the article above reports on this group’s first meeting.

Climate Change

This group has had an initial meeting via Zoom – see above report

UK Poverty

This group has yet to meet but we hope to arrange this soon

If you are interested in joining any of these groups then simply email <mailto:jandp@dioceseofleeds.org.uk>
We would be delighted to welcome new members

CAN WE STILL CAMPAIGN IN A TIME OF LOCKDOWN?

By Carol Burns

Of course the answer is 'yes' and I am sure many of you are linked to Change.org and Avaaz as well as other campaigning organisations such as Church Action on Poverty or Sabeel Kairos, to name a few that come to mind. I wanted to share a small example of campaigning in Garforth.



The Garforth Social Action Group which includes members from St Benedict's Parish have been engaging with their local MP, Alec Shelbrooke, in the last few years. Most recently we met him at the Climate Justice Lobby in June 2019 and decided to follow this up by arranging to meet him again to address some of the Lobby issues including ensuring DFID does not support projects overseas which promote fossil fuels and also to hear more about the practical initiatives the government intends to take to reach their targets for Net Zero Carbon emissions.

We wanted to involve St Benedict's Primary school, as well, as their eco council had some concerns they wanted

to raise. Our meeting would have been on May 1st and, of course, this was postponed.

However, given the opportunities that the Covid Crisis has provided us with for a Green Deal, we The four of us from Garforth Social Action group had a pre meeting on Zoom to plan what each of us would say.

It was a short meeting and we felt it was the beginning of a longer discussion. There was certainly no argument about helping to restart the economy with policies which would also help reach zero carbon emissions. He is a member of the One Nation Conservative grouping of backbenchers and he and especially the new Northern Conservative MPs are looking for policies which will help their constituents and cement their own position.

We agreed to send him some information and we will be asking him the questions the Committee on Climate Change are asking the government – more details can be found by using this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/y8a8tdbh>

It felt important to ensure that he knew that some of his constituents are concerned about the Climate Crisis and to keep the dialogue going. It's all about building relationships and this was a good step on the way.

REFLECTION**A PRAYER FOR HEALING**

Jesus, you ask, 'Do you want to be healed?'
Oh yes, Lord, we want to be healed.

From our self-preoccupation and self-pity,
and our indifference to those in need,
From our greed for material things and our
wasting of the gifts we have been given,

Oh yes, Lord, we want to be healed.
From our reluctance to let go of hurts, and
our pursuit of petty revenge,
From our fear and anxiety, and our inability
to trust you or our neighbour,
Oh yes, Lord, we want to be healed.

From our lethargy and cynicism in the face
of the need to change and be changed,
From our narrow judgements, our
unthinking prejudice and our easy
acceptance of stereotypes,
Oh yes, Lord, we want to be healed.

Amen.

John O'Donohue

**WHAT IS HAPPENING IN YOUR PARISH?**

We know of parishes that are still collecting points for foodbanks, not to mention the ongoing work of SVP groups and the UCM across the Diocese.

Is there any campaigning work going on in your area?

Are you using Zoom Whatsapp or other digital communications to keep your work for social justice going?

We know that a number of parishes are regularly emailing parishioners who have provided email addresses.

It would be good to share details – so that parishes where such things are not happening can understand the possibilities and not feel helpless.







Please get in touch to let us know - who knows who you might inspire?

Just email us a few details using jandp@dioceseofleeds.org.uk



EVENTS

Online Events and Webinars plus key dates and some events that may still be going ahead

 Wed 20 May Thu 21 May Tue 26 May Thu 28 May	<p>Laudato Si Week: CAFOD Events Livestreamed mass from Salford Cathedral <i>6pm livestreamed – simply click on the link below</i> https://www.churchservices.tv/salfordcathedral CAFOD also have a number of other online events for which you can register:- Thu 21 May – A talk by Neil Thorns, Head of Advocacy at CAFOD Tue 26 May – Coronavirus in Latin America Thu 28 May – How volunteers respond quickly to emergencies in Zimbabwe & Nigeria You can register for any of these by going to the CAFOD website: https://cafod.org.uk/Volunteer/Online-talks</p>
 Fri 29th May	<p>Renewing the face of the Earth: A Pentecost Liturgy <i>11:00 via Zoom videoconference</i> Justice and Peace Leeds are holding an online liturgy for Pentecost to pray for the renewal of the earth post the current crisis. Please email Helen at jandpleeds@dioceseofleeds.org.uk for a Zoom invitation.</p>
 Wed 20 May Fri 22 May.	<p>Social Action: Integral Ecology and Community Building in Times of a Global Pandemic by Caritas Internationalis and GCCM <i>UK time 2pm and 4 pm on 20 May & 2pm on 22 May</i> This is an Online Event and you can sign up for it here https://laudatosiweek.org/event/other-online-event-social-action/</p> 
 Wednesday 24th June	<p>Justice and peace Online Gathering <i>7:30pm via Zoom videoconferencing</i> The J&P Leeds Commission will be holding an evening Zoom Gathering for all members of the Commission and J&P supporters. Included is a key speaker TBA and discussions on the Commission’s priorities as well as the J&P Leeds AGM. Details to follow soon from John Battle (Chair)..... You can register now to attend this event and we will send you the Zoom joining details nearer the time</p>
 Tue 01 Sep – Sun 04 Oct	<p>The Season of Creation 2020 <i>Worldwide</i> This season was created in 1989 in the Orthodox church and endorsed in 2015 after Pope Francis published <i>Laudato Si</i>. We are all encouraged to ensure that our liturgies reflect the need to care for our Common Home during this season. Needs some ideas? – Then take a look at https://catholicclimatemovement.global/</p>

Please forward this email E-News onto anyone else who you think might be interested. Even better, get them to send us their email address so we can add them to our contact database.

See our website for full details of these and other events that may be of interest