

New Economic Relationships?

By John Battle, Chair the J&P Commission.

In a recent video message to a forum of young people in Assisi, Pope Francis said the worst reaction to the Coronavirus crisis would be to "fall even more deeply into feverish consumerism and forms of selfish self-protection". He called instead for the world's poor to be involved in creating a "different economic narrative" as economies emerge from the pandemic.

Professor Robert Dingwall in the Nottingham epicentre argues that pandemic policy was driven by "a hierarchy of well-paid professionals working from home" making rules for working class people who have to go out and face the actual risks of Covid19 infection. He writes "Groceries and other supplies can be delivered to middle class doors while the people behind them wait for the infection rate to fall to a level where they themselves feel it is safe to go out".



Meanwhile "many of the people designated as 'essential workers' who have to continue working through lockdown are amongst the lowest paid. They work in factories, care homes, warehouses, fields and packaging plants and are forced to adhere to patrician policies". His claim is that "science has

forgotten society". It can be argued that so has economic thinking.

Even before Covid19 struck "in work" poverty had developed as a key characteristic of the UK economy. The number working in the insecure "gig economy" doubled to 2.8 million between 2016-2019; a million people were on zero hours contracts, a further million were agency workers. At the outbreak of Covid19 3.6 million people in the UK (one worker in nine) was in insecure work and low wages.

Today 2 million people earn less than £120 a week and the £98.50 weekly sick pay is the lowest in the OECD. Those moving from being "furloughed" to unemployment find themselves in the welfare system of Universal Credit support and usually suffer a shocking reduction in their monthly income. And this is because the former Chancellor Osborne's "austerity budgets" mean cuts to the welfare system that are still baked into the national economy.

With the economic outlook worsening a further 6 million households are expected to become reliant on benefits. The net result is child poverty levels rising to 3.5 million children according to government measurements as Joseph Rowntree Trust reports are regularly spelling out. Little wonder that foodbanks are becoming "essential" and overwhelmed.

Some not least right leaning influential "think tanks" and media are reviving the old tropes of poverty as a "product of life style". They reintroduce "the need to reduce wages" (including cancelling the statutory minimum wage renamed 'living wage' until recently), the need to stress "jobs and work as the cure to moral deficiencies" and the "way out of

poverty" (regardless of income) and the old blame questions return.

"Should people have kids if they can't afford them?"

"Why can't you feed a family adequately while on benefits?"

"Should people on benefits be allowed to buy mobile phones if food is an issue?"

All this illustrates is that it is evident that there are too many people who have no idea how complex poverty is. There are well developed multi-dimensional definitions of poverty in our society and it is certainly not caused by parents blowing their money, whether wages or benefits, on "inessentials". Poverty is less the product of individual life choices and overwhelmingly the inevitable consequence of deficient economic and social arrangements that shape all our lives and not the least low wages, low incomes, unemployment and illnesses.

Moreover, poverty is the consequence of political choices and decisions. Rather than reverting to outdated "shaming" tropes there or a real need to focus more intently on complex root causes.

Is there a specifically Christian approach to poverty in the tradition of the Scriptures and light of the Gospel? Pope Francis insists that we take poverty more seriously; "poverty is real not a faceless statistic... poverty has a face. It has the face of a child. It has the face of a family. It has the face of people young and old... Without faces and stories human lives become statistics and we run the risk of bureaucratising the sufferings of others".



He stresses that there is a danger of discussing "hunger", "food", "without reference to the real people knocking at our door today". Moreover Pope Francis suggests that the first step in fighting poverty is to "de- naturalise" it and shed light on the causes;" a selfish and wrong distribution of resources" -as well as the "abuse and exploitation of the earth".

The Covid19 crisis is a challenge point of "no return" throwing into disarray crude beliefs in progress as "growth through individual accumulation, higher income and consumption". Breaking through is a glimpse of a vision of sharing resources that must be addressed in each generation.

Questions of poverty cannot be disconnected from issues of wealth, scarcity in the midst of plenty & sufficiency and the need to address repairing broken relationships. As tax evaders and avoiders shift the sharing burden onto the backs of the poor, proposals for a "universal basic income" (mentioned as an option by Pope Francis at the 2020 UN General Session) are gaining traction nationally and internationally, perhaps thanks to the Coronavirus!



Leeds Justice and Peace Commission Online

By Helen Hayden

J&P Leeds

Leeds J&P continues to provide opportunity to reflect, pray and take action on our three priorities.

These activities now take place online through Zoom primarily. This medium has its challenges, praying together can be done but we can't hear each other but we can be together to share ideas and reflect on the issues we face as a community.

There are benefits however, on Saturday 21st November we held a Day of Reflection with Fr Diarmuid O'Murchu. Around 40 people joined the day of reflection and we were not limited by geography. We were blessed to be joined by people from Northumberland to Jersey and from Cork in Ireland. It was very humbling and uplifting to be able to come together in the spirit without those physical boundaries. Indeed Fr Diarmuid led the day from Dublin, which means no travel therefore a reduced carbon footprint to the event.

In October we celebrated a liturgy focussed on the Season of Creation, the crisis we face to the climate and our environment and how we can be agents of change and hope.

Continuing with a series of liturgies, the next celebration is our Advent liturgy on the Thursday 3rd December which we are focussing on UK Poverty. We are working with Liam Purcell from Church Action on Poverty ensuring that we listen to the voices of people with lived experience of poverty.

Similar to the Season of Creation, the liturgy will reflect on the difficult and complex issue of poverty but will celebrate resilience and creativity of our community and look at how we can affect positive change together.

Everyone is welcome to join the Advent Liturgy, please click the link below to register. If there are any issues email jandp@dioceseofleeds.org.uk for a Zoom invitation.

The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor – do we?

A Liturgy for Advent



An Advent service to celebrate the resilience and creativity of people responding to their difficulties in trying to live their lives with the fullness of their God-given dignity – and their challenge to the rich.

Take this opportunity for an Advent liturgy to help you prepare for Christmas through prayer, song and listening.

Click the link to join [The Lord Hears The Cry of the Poor.... Do We? Tickets, Thu 3 Dec 2020 at 19:30 | Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-lord-hears-the-cry-of-the-poor-do-we-tickets-123456789012)

A message from Church Action on Poverty - please take action to Reset the Debt

By Liam Purcell

Church Action on Poverty

An estimated six million people in the UK have fallen behind on one or more household bill as a result of Covid-19, with the biggest increases in debt amongst the poorest households.

People who were previously able to keep their head above water are now in severe difficulty. Others, who had been just staying afloat, now face being overwhelmed by circumstances entirely beyond their control.

"I don't answer the door, or answer the phone if I don't know who it is. I know I can't pay the rent, I am scared it might be him asking for it. What can I say? I have no money, I can't earn money now and I can't get benefits... If the debt was taken away, I would cry. I wouldn't be scared or worried all the time. I would be able to study and hopefully get a career job, and not always be counting and thinking about money."

(Leanne)

This is an urgent problem that demands a solution. It is not right that those with the fewest resources should bear the heaviest burden of the lockdown, potentially for years to come.

Now is the time for a solution to be found. People swept into debt by Covid-19 now need a Jubilee. It's time to #ResetTheDebt.



We're proposing that the Chancellor creates a Jubilee Fund. This would provide grants to pay off and cancel unavoidable debt accrued by households during the lockdown period, giving them a more stable platform from which to face the future.

You can help call for action. Please visit <https://resetthedebt.uk> to read our report, and then email your MP, calling on them to ask the Chancellor what the Government's plans are to address the crisis.

Reset The Debt is a campaign launched by the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, Church Action on Poverty, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. The campaign grew out of our listening and learning to communities during the lockdown of 2020, as part of our Gleanings project. We heard that debt was becoming an increasing problem for households and communities across the UK



The Foodbank

Arranged by John Duffy, Commission Member

All the words that follow (apart from Luke's Gospel) are taken from an article by a Guardian reporter who spent a month with Huddersfield's food bank. As well as the grim poverty, she describes the dedication of the workers, and the decency of ordinary people, supporters, volunteers and clients.

Every morning at the Welcome Centre in Huddersfield goes like this.

She makes her way to the kitchen, for a cup of tea,
It's about dignity, respect, her pokey, strip-lit office

The Centre 25 years ago, was a small, church-run affair, just a cupboard of tins to give to people whose houses had burned down, or flooded – that sort of thing.
Now it supports anyone – from 18-year-old care leavers to working families, women fleeing domestic violence, asylum seekers.



Every corridor and store cupboard is crammed with crates and clear storage baskets. sanitary towels tampons, nappies toothpaste, shower gel shampoo (never enough men's razors and shaving foam).

Fridays –
the busiest day,
the doorbell
the doorbell is ringing
the doorbell is ringing constantly.

For one person for a week:
a carton of milk,
two tins of meat meals, two
tins of soup,
two tins of baked beans,
one tin of fish,
one jar of pasta sauce,
500g of pasta,
a jar of peanut butter,
a box of cereal, a pack
of dried noodles, two
sachets

of instant
soup,
one bag of sugar, 20
teabags, two
chocolate bars,
a loaf of bread
some butter, two
baking potatoes,
four eggs,
two carrots,
three bananas,
a packet of
biscuits.

He's been through difficult times himself,
buys packet soups and puts them
through the letterbox.



*Could we cancel her pack for next week,
asks a woman in sixties,
(who doesn't eat that much)
so someone else can have it?*

A couple, who are sleeping in their car:
after the pack is done, she pauses,
puts in a box of chocolates,
it might lift their spirits.
It was gone midday.
A young child opened the door,
looked at the food,
ran to ask her mother
if she could eat breakfast now.

The day the government voted to end free
school meals
during school holidays for low-income
children,
she says:

*No one wants to see children go
hungry, do they?*

An MP tweeted: "I do not believe in
nationalising children.
Instead, we need to get back to the
idea of taking responsibility,
and that means less celebrity virtue-signalling
on Twitter.

*Or at least, you'd think they don't
want to see that...*

The only way any of us will get through
the next few months is together.
And these will be very dark months, indeed.

Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to
him in the middle of the night to say *My
friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend
of mind on his travels has just arrived at my
house and I have nothing to offer him*, and
the man answers from inside the house, *Do
not bother me. The door is bolted now, and
my children and I are in bed, I cannot get up
to give it you*. I tell you, if the man does not
get up and give it to him for friendship's sake,
persistence will be enough to make him get
up and give his friend what he wants.

She smiles – the letterbox is full
of sachets of chicken noodle soup.
Their supporter has been round, again.

You can read the whole article by clicking the
link below

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/10/half-term-hardship-and-heartbreak-one-month-in-the-life-of-a-food-bank-manager>



FILM REVIEW – JEWS STEP FORWARD

By Anne Tracy, Leeds Pax Christi



This year, as part of the online Leeds Palestinian Film Festival, the Justice and Peace Commission sponsored the film 'Jews Step Forward'. The panel discussion is available online until the 28th November.

It is easy to get the impression from the media that Israel's occupation of Palestine is regarded by all Jews as a literally God-given right, or at the very least, as an unfortunate but necessary act of self-defence. – Which gives this film a very interesting slant, for in it, Jews from Israel, Europe and particularly America, offer a very different take on the history and the realities of today. They are members of campaigning organisations such as Jewish Voices for Peace, the Middle Eastern Children's Alliance, Veterans for Peace and many more. They believe that the narrative the government of Israel expounds, is politically false and contrary to everything their heritage holds most sacred.

Some of those in the film are survivors of the Holocaust and it is seared into their memories. One woman remembers being on a Kindertransport to the UK; she reads us the last letter her mother was able to send her. Another remembers her father desperately saying over and over 'But where are they all' unable to take in that so many friends and relatives have simply disappeared. Even those born after the war in distant America remember the shock of hearing the stories and seeing the pictures; how fearful it made

him says one speaker, them that another Holocaust could happen at anytime.

They remember too, joy they felt at the birth of the State of Israel in 1948. We see film of ships carrying refugees from Europe, and young settlers full of hope, many setting up socialist kibbutzim and farms, to 'make the dessert bloom' some with a more ominous Zionist dream. It was said to be, 'A land without people, for a people without a land'. Except of course, it was not. The 'the homes and dishes, the furniture, the clothing the olive trees' and the land, belonged to the people who lived there.

And so, we see more terrible pictures and stories, this time of Palestinians. Photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto are set beside pictures of murdered Palestinians. An academic tells of the thousands of military documents he researched, finding plans and orders to drive the Palestinians from their land. There are films of refugee, destroyed villages and murdered villagers.

An activist tells how she tried to talk to her Jewish friend about what she had found when she visited the West Bank and was bluntly told 'I don't want to know.' But the people in this film have made their stand and will not be silenced. We see them in demonstrations against Israeli goods in supermarkets, and outside synagogues with placards reading 'Anti-Occupation is NOT anti-Semitism.' They are clear there can be no solution until there is justice and they ask their viewers to support boycotts and do whatever is possible in our local and faith communities. The film using old newsreel footage, film, photographs and witnesses, tells the modern story of Israel/Palestine, but is remarkable in that it does this through the eyes of Jews who have 'stepped forward' and who may have an important part to play in the achievement of a just peace.

 Until Sat 28 Nov	<p>Leeds Palestinian Film Festival</p> <p>Discover Palestine through the Eyes of Others – sign up to the J&P Sponsored film : “Jews Step Forward”</p> <p>Please see website for details www.leedspff.org.uk/</p>
 Wed 25 Nov 7.30pm – 8.45pm	<p>Panel Discussion of the Film ‘Jews Step Forward’</p> <p>If you sign up to view the film (minimum charge £3) you can also submit questions about the issues raised for a panel discussion.</p> <p><i>The video of this discussion will be available to view on the Festival platform from 25 November until the end of the Festival on Saturday 28 November – the timing shown on this event is only advisory. The panel will be chaired by John Battle, Chair of the Commission, and will include a range of people with extensive backgrounds in the issues raised.</i></p>
 Wed Dec 2nd 6.30pm- 8.00 pm	<p>“Update on life in Bethlehem in the time of Coronavirus”</p> <p>– Webinar with Sami Awad. This is a Yorkshire Sabeel-Kairos event</p> <p>Sami Awad will talk about the current reality of life in Bethlehem and all areas under occupation together with his hopes for 2021.</p> <p>Booking is via Eventbrite and they will send you the Zoom link in the afternoon on 2nd December. Any profits from donations via Eventbrite will be donated to The Holy Land Trust.</p>
 Thurs Dec 3rd 7.30pm – 8.30pm	<p>The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor – do we? A Liturgy for Advent</p> <p>An Advent service to celebrate the resilience and creativity of people responding to their difficulties in trying to live their lives with the fullness of their God-given dignity – and their challenge to the rich.</p> <p>Take this opportunity for an Advent liturgy to help you prepare for Christmas through prayer, song and listening.</p> <p>Click the link to join The Lord Hears The Cry of the Poor.... Do We? Tickets, Thu 3 Dec 2020 at 19:30 Eventbrite</p> 
 From 29th Nov – 6th Jan @ 6pm	<p>Come along with us on our ‘Journey to the Manger’</p> <p>CAFOD Just one world</p> <p>From 29 November, join us live every Sunday for some simple and peaceful prayer and reflection as we share our Advent journey together. We will gather around a candle and be gently led in a time of prayer.</p> <p>Webinar: CAFOD Advent Prayer - A Journey To The Manger by CAFOD (bigmarker.com)</p>