



## A Year To Reflect

By Helen Hayden

Justice and Peace Commission

As the year draws to its end, we reflect on what we have lived through in these last twelve months. In January we began to hear of a mysterious virus in Wuhan, China, it felt very far away and we'd seen SARS and Bird Flu, there was no reason to suggest that this would affect us the UK. As people began to leave China, returning to be quarantined we still had little idea that we too would soon be living under such restrictions.



I am still shocked when I think back to that day in March when the Prime Minister announced that we were going into lockdown. I told the children that they'd be going back to school after Easter, they did but another five months after Easter. Our lives changed overnight. Many of the problems J&P are aware of were brought into relief. However, there were some improvements and we experienced a different way of life.

As mentioned before, J&P changed and adapted. We signed up to Zoom early in lockdown and our first online liturgy was Pentecost. The pandemic has raised the issues of poverty which was the focus of our most recent liturgy on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 'The Lord Hears The Cry Of The Poor-Do We?', the challenge was to reflect on the we do listen and work with the poor, do we know the poor? Can we put names to faces? We heard from people with lived experienced of poverty, for whom the pandemic and

lockdowns has pushed them over the edge, tipping that balance from keeping your head above water to drowning.

Liam from Church Action on Poverty worked with us on the liturgy and shared their campaign to **Send your MP a Reset the Debt Bauble this Christmas** [Reset The Debt – A fresh start for families in Britain swept into debt by Covid-19](#)



Another of our' priorities has had a renewed focus in 2020: the Climate Crisis. Never has our environment been more important. There was an improvement in air quality, people appreciated their local areas of green space and discovered new ones. The bird song was clearer and louder or we were actually able to hear it!

On our Day of Reflection in<sup>t</sup> November, with Dairmuir O'Murchu, we explored 'What Does Empowering Justice Look Like In Our Time?'



Dairmuir discussed with us the concept of 'Ecojustice' that there can be no real justice unless there is justice for all of creation. We explored 'Compassionate Networking' and a different ways of thinking about the Kingdom of God and we need another day of reflection on parables! It was an inspiring and empowering day.



It was during lockdown that we learned that the draft Environment Policy, prepared by a group of Commission members and other volunteers, had been agreed by the Diocesan Trustees. Now we need to work alongside parishes as they seek to understand what this means for parish communities.

There are negatives with Zoom; praying and singing together communally is difficult but the fact that it enables us to come together, see one another, discuss and reflect is a blessing. There are huge benefits also; we have been joined by people from the United States, Ireland and various parts of the UK. This would not be possible previously. The networking mentioned earlier takes on a whole new level!



The pandemic has shown us how utterly connected we are as a global community. What happens in one part of the world will affect us. The way we live, what we buy and sell, the way we travel and heat our homes affect other people. This realisation means that we can act to have a positive impact especially for the poorest, most vulnerable communities.

As we go into 2021 with the roll out of a vaccine, we need to consider that we might not want to go back to our old lives and ways of living. We do not have to. We have all missed people and being together, yet people have thought more about others this year than ever before. Many people have lost loved ones, and many have struggled throughout this year. It is with these people

in mind that we need to create a global society which empowers.

We need to fight for the poor and make sure that we build a future that children are not hungry, people are not desperate, that our wealth is shared and that we tackle the causes of poverty so abhorrent in one of the richest countries in the world. We need to repair our relationship with our environment, we have lived with less this year, we have lived more simply, this may cause economic problems in the short term but if we can share wealth, we can create a fairer and more sustainable society.

The three priorities of the Justice and Peace Commission allow us to undertake this work, to do our bit to tackle the climate crisis, UK poverty and bring about peace.

The focus of our next liturgy in the new year will be peace, please join us to pray for ways we can care for each other.

### **'Pathways to Peace for Earthlings'**

**Sunday 17 January 4pm-5pm**

**Via Zoom**

Join us for some prayer, reflection and quiet time on Peace Sunday. We reflect on the Pope's message ***"A culture of Care as a Path to Peace"***.

A culture of care is needed both in relating to everyone else on this planet and in how we care for the planet itself – do we often view ourselves as 'Earthlings' – people with a Common Home?

The liturgy will last no more than an hour. Please click here to register via Eventbrite

<https://tinyurl.com/jppeace2021>



## Living Laudato Si': Your Planet and Your Parish.

*Sr Margaret Atkins, Boarbank Hall.*

Around fifty people were involved in a recent Zoom weekend from Boarbank Hall on the theme *Living Laudato Si': Your Planet and Your Parish*. It aimed to inspire, inform, connect and encourage anyone wanting to engage in practical and prayerful projects in response to the encyclical, especially through parish groups and activities. After all, the Church, with its combination of local and global networks, is the perfect structure for helping to reshape the world in its current state of crisis. We need small parish groups to be the leaven in the lump of the Church, and the Church to be the leaven in the lump of the world.



The original plan had been to have a residential weekend at Boarbank. Switching to Zoom, for obvious reasons, enabled us to reach far more people, and led to a very lively set of conversations, and in particular the pooling of questions, information, ideas and experience. We are still busy collating the fruits of these to share with the group, and more widely.

The long weekend began and ended with encouragement from two bishops who have led from the front in their own dioceses and more widely. Bishop Richard Moth set a prayerful tone with his reflection on the importance of taking time to attend and discern. Bishop John Arnold concluded by encouraging us to respond to both *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* with faith and hope.

On Saturday we had three talks, well spaced to allow people to escape from their screens in between! Trish Sandbach, who worked for many years for OXFAM and is now an assessor for the *LiveSimply* award, talked us through the process of leading her own parish to the award, and added some theological reflection inspired also by the encyclical. John Paul de Quay, founder of the Ecological Conversion Group and the *Journey to 2030* website, both supported by the Bishops' Conference, spoke about ecological conversion, and answered with humour imagined objections that he has frequently encountered. Sr Margaret Atkins spoke about the way in which the power of technology can shape our mindsets, distancing us from reality and generating both pride and thoughtlessness.

Sunday afternoon and evening were dedicated to questions to our panellists, who covered a range of topics: wildlife gardening, organic gardening, tree planting and compost; energy saving and installing electric points; disinvestment and reinvestment; reducing waste; connecting with the younger generation, and listening to the cry of the poor. The very informative and lively questions and answers were supplemented by an equally active contribution on the chat from the participants.





On the final evening, we made space for general discussion, with a focus on how to take the work of the weekend forward, in particular by benefiting from contacts with each other: various possibilities for online groups and contacts are now in process. The resources shared over the weekend by participants will also be made available in a user-friendly form, especially through the *Journey to 2030* website. [About - The Journey to 2030](#)

Two other features made the weekend more than an online conference. We shared online Night Prayer, and one Morning Prayer, beautifully presented by Karen Groves and John Moffat, our online hosts. We also offered participants a screen-free activity each day, to enable them to pray, reflect and act on themes relevant to the whole weekend.

We found that there was certainly enough interest to repeat the weekend, probably more than once. If you are interested or know anyone who might be, please contact Sr Margaret on [margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk](mailto:margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk), or just keep an eye on the *Journey to 2030* or Boarbank Hall ([www.boarbankhall.org.uk](http://www.boarbankhall.org.uk)) websites. The more we can do to encourage, inform and support each other, the more hope and joy there will be in a dark and threatened world.

And one final task for you. Where are all the millions of trees we need to plant in this country going to come from? Well, how about you?

This year is a great one for acorns. Oaks have long tap roots, so the best plant pots for them are upcycled plastic drinks bottles! Simply cut the top off, and make a drainage hole or two in the bottom and plant the

acorn. In a few years' time, you will have to find a good place to plant it, perhaps with the help of your Church or a local community group.

Best of all, find some young people to do this with - your children or your grandchildren. They will be around to see the miracle of this little acorn growing into a majestic tree. So will their children and grandchildren....



Saving waste, reducing carbon, helping biodiversity, creating beauty, great exercise, and really good fun. What better way of growing hope this autumn? Not so much 'Pay as you Go', rather 'Pray as you Grow!'

## Livesimply award

For more information on the Live Simply Award please see CAFOD's website on [Livesimply award | CAFOD](#) and listen to our Vice Chair Trish Sandbach in this LiveSimply video <https://youtu.be/PKZ4k8Dhckl>

**CAFOD** Catholic Agency for Overseas Development



## Commemoration of the Women Martyrs of El Salvador

By Sr Gemma Simmonds

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December the Romero Trust, in conjunction with Pax Christi and CAFOD organised a service to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of 4 Maryknoll sisters by paramilitaries in El Salvador. The following address was given at that service by Sr Gemma Simmonds.



From the earliest time in the church's history the martyrs have been commemorated by consecrating altars that enclose within them the bodily relics of those who died for their faith. There are no such altars for the women martyrs of El Salvador, but we come together this evening to venerate their memory and to acknowledge a church nourished on their blood and built on the strong pillars of their sacrifice.

No such honour was done, no such acknowledgement made on the day when the violated and bullet-ridden bodies of Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan were discovered buried in a shallow grave not far from the airport where they had last been seen alive. Like many other women across the world who fall victim to the brutalities of armed conflict, these martyrs for their faith were raped before they were murdered. It may seem strange, even shocking for me to dwell on this aspect of their death, but I do so in order to honour them.

The Catholic Church has laid great emphasis on virginity and the protection of chastity as a sign of holiness. Whether the virgin martyrs of early Rome like St Agnes and St Emerentiana, nuns like St Therèse, the Little Flower, or young lay women like Maria Goretti, the emphasis has been on purity, with all the questions that that raises for many modern women about the glory and complexity of human sexuality and our concept of holiness. We are not only here to honour the American missionaries to El Salvador. We are honouring also the many women: catechists, and those who evangelised simply through the witness of lives lived for others, who also died during the horrors of the military repression. Many of them were wives and mothers, others perhaps made different life choices, but their bodies were in every way sacred: blessed, broken and shared in their generous witness to justice and their firm resistance of evil. Three of the American missionaries were religious sisters, vowed to chastity. Jean Donovan was engaged to be married. The National Guardsmen who raped and killed them may well have thought that they were subjugating and humiliating these women, taking something away from them. But in perpetrating these appalling violations they were also uniting them in the closest possible union with Christ himself.

Theologian David Tombs has written vividly of the custom prevalent in ancient Rome of sexually humiliating conquered kings and military leaders before executing them. He points to the fact that in the Gospel narratives Jesus is stripped naked no less than four times and paraded in front of hundreds of soldiers. He suggests the possibility that Jesus was sexually abused and humiliated as part of the preparation for his death. This would not be unusual when dealing with a high status



prisoner. The Romans liked to reduce his status as a leader and a man in order to terrify his followers into submission. In its subsequent depictions of Christ's crucifixion and suffering the Church has preferred to draw a veil of discretion over this brutal possibility, as it often draws a veil of discretion and forgetfulness over facts which don't entirely fit with our stylized notions of holiness. Whatever the factual truth of this, the ancient creeds also teach us that, in his humiliation and death, Jesus descended into hell. It was there that he was waiting to be met by the women we commemorate today. They are not only remembered and venerated for the heroic witness of their death. They are remembered and venerated for the passion with which they gave their lives to the suffering people of El Salvador. It was a passion inspired by the courage of the religious leaders of the *pueblos* where they ministered. Shortly before her death, Maura wrote to a friend,

*'[The campesinos] are the most rugged and faith-filled men and women [...] It takes courage for them to continue any celebration of the word or meetings because anyone suspected of being [...] attached to the church is in serious danger [...] The poor really strip you, pull you, challenge you, evangelise you, show you God' (1)*

The missionaries and *campesinas* had the courage to remain alongside the crucified people of El Salvador despite knowing the mortal danger to themselves. They entered into the worst hell that human beings can devise for one another in terms of cruelty, violence and deliberately inflicted poverty. It was here that they met the crucified Jesus. He himself tells us that whatsoever we do to the least of his sisters and brothers we do to him. If we allow it to, their need strips us, pulls us, challenges us, evangelises us and shows us God. But few of us allow ourselves to be challenged and called in this way. Few of us

find the heart, as Maura, Ita, Dorothy and Jean did, to give so much of ourselves to others or to Christ in others.

These martyrs and their families were also stripped of justice in the aftermath of their death. The most shameful thing that happened to them was not the manner of their death but the way in which their own government, the Salvadorian government and some Church leaders were willing to compromise and deny the reality of their own collusion with the deaths of these and other martyrs like Oscar Romero in order to safeguard what they thought of as the overriding value of their own political and ideological goals.

The death of the women martyrs of El Salvador lays wide open, even today, questions which continue to challenge us. Our rigid notions of holiness may lead us to forget the embodied beauty of the human person and the dignity that we all carry as children of God, irrespective of what happens to those bodies. Our desire to stay safe can lead us to make alliances that are profoundly ungodly, when all the while the poor come dangerously close to Jesus as he lives deeply immersed in the very margins of society. Maura, Ita, Dorothy and Jean found among El Salvador's poor something worth living and dying for.

Those who killed them thought they were taking away the value of their lives. What they and those who colluded with them did was to show for all the world to see the shining glory of those who dare to go down into hell with the crucified Jesus only to rise with him again for all eternity.

(1) Donna Whitson Brett and Edward T. Brett eds., *Martyrs of Hope: Seven US Missionaries in Central America*, (Maryknoll NY., Orbis, 2018), p. 235



**Prayer this Christmas**

God of joy

Remind me to rejoice

Wrapped up in my Christmas gifts

Tied down in my debts

I have forgotten

God of peace,

Remind me of your calm

In my anxiety

And in my haste

I have forgotten

God of all

Remind me

Of the true light of Christmas

Of your gift shared

In my own wants

And in my own needs

I have forgotten

Wrapped up in my little world

Remind me of your world

God of joy, remind me

To rejoice

**Amen.**

***Linda Jones/CAFOD***



**The J&P Commission members and Helen wish you and your families a very Happy and Holy Christmas.**

**Thank you for your continued support and may the new year bring renewed hope.**



We look forward to seeing you on one of our online Zoom events in 2021 or even in-person!

**Don't forget – you can now donate £5 towards our work simply by texting Churchjp to 70500**

See our website for other donation options



EVENTS

 <b>Sun 20 Dec</b> <b>Sun 06 Jan</b> <b>@ 6pm</b>	<p><b>Come along with us on our ‘Journey to the Manger’</b></p> <p><b>CAFOD</b> 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><a href="https://bigmarker.com">Webinar: CAFOD Advent Prayer - A Journey To The Manger by CAFOD (bigmarker.com)</a></p>
 <b>Thur 17 Dec</b> <b>@ 7.30pm</b>	<p><b>Against The Grain: Garth Hewitt’s Christmas Concert for the Amos Trust</b></p>  <p>Part celebration of Garth Hewitt’s 35 years with Amos Trust, part online Christmas concert —Please click here to <a href="#">Webinar Registration - Zoom</a></p>
 <b>Sun 17 Jan</b> <b>2021</b> <b>@4pm</b>	<p><b>‘Pathways to Peace for Earthlings’</b></p> <p>Join us for some prayer, reflection and quiet time on Peace Sunday. We reflect on the Pope’s message <i>“A culture of Care as a Path to Peace”</i>. A culture of care is needed both in relating to everyone else on this planet and to how we care for the planet itself – hence the emphasis on our relationship with the Earth by using the term ‘Earthlings’.</p> <p>The liturgy will last no more than an hour. Please click here to register <a href="https://tinyurl.com/jppeace2021">https://tinyurl.com/jppeace2021</a></p>
 <b>Sun 21 Feb</b> <b>2021</b> <b>All Day</b>	<p><b>Church Action On Poverty Sunday – New Wine Skins</b></p> <p>Join churches around the UK in prayer, giving and action this Church Action on Poverty Sunday. Share a vision for a society founded on compassion and justice, where all people are able to exercise dignity, agency and power.</p> <p>Use their free resources to reflect and pray for change, and raise funds to enable more people to speak truth to power.</p> <p>More info at <a href="http://church-poverty.org.uk">Church Action on Poverty Sunday - Church Action on Poverty (church-poverty.org.uk)</a></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 details of these and other events which may be of interest.**