



## **CLIMATE PRAYER VIGIL AT THE BISHOP'S CONFERENCE**

*By Matty Maslen*



*Vigil attendees outside Hinsley Hall*

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, several Catholic climate activists – held a five-hour prayer vigil outside Hinsley Hall during the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) Autumn Plenary Meeting.

The meeting took place at Hinsley Hall, Leeds. The Animators held their vigil from 12noon until 5pm. The group consisted of activists from Dioceses across England and Wales. Among them were members of the Justice and Peace Commission's Climate Action Group, Laudato Si Animators, Christian Climate Action, Green Christian, CAFOD, and ACTA.

In the lead up to the conference the activists had sent each of the Bishops a letter, signed by around 50 Laudato Si Animators and

Christian Climate Action members. In the letter they asked that the Bishops speak out to the UK Government about compensation and reparation owed to those countries who are already suffering at the hands of the climate crisis, a crisis that we, not they, are not responsible for. They appealed to the Conference to ask the UK Prime Minister to sign up to the 'Damage and Loss' proposals at COP27

The activists displayed a banner reading "Loss and Damage is a Pro-Life Issue", referencing the catastrophic effects that the climate crisis is already beginning to cause. As the impacts of the climate crisis will not be equally felt across the world, the group prayed for vital global financial assistance for MAPA – the



most affected people and areas. The group also displayed a banner of Mary Mother of Mercy, painted by Helen Elwes which depicts Mary sheltering people and animals from a burning rainforest.

Their letter to the Bishops also asked that the Bishops raise awareness of the intersectionality between the 'cries of the earth' and the 'cries of the poor' through releasing a pastoral letter and encouraging screenings of the film 'The Letter'. 'The Letter' is a film released recently by the Laudato Si Movement and The Vatican Dicastries of Communications of Integral Human Development.

As the Bishops walked to the bus that took them to Mass for Cardinal Roche at the Cathedral at 5pm, they walked past the activists and their banners. The group was joined in prayer by several Bishops at the Conference – including Bp John of Salford, spokesperson for the environment for the CBCEW. It is thought that our own Bishop, Bishop Marcus, travelled to the mass by car and so did not walk past group or have the opportunity to join.

The statement following the CBCEW meeting encourages Catholics to take up Friday abstinence from meat, Diocesan carbon reduction monitoring, and encourages parishes and schools to adopt the CAFOD LIVESIMPLY scheme. One of the activists, David Jackson, said: "Not quite what the letter sent to each Bishop asked for – but steps in the right direction".

This story was published in ICAN, where you can find more statements attendees:  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/45904>



## COMBONI ABUSE SURVIVORS UPDATE

*By John Duffy, Commission Member*

After many years campaigning, being ignored and treated as troublemakers, the Comboni Survivors Group have achieved their aim, in a meeting in September with the Very Reverend Tesfaye Tadesse, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries.

The group persisted through barren years to have such a meeting, and gradually built support from a number of groups and individuals, including latterly the Leeds Justice and Peace Commission. Most crucial was the support of Bishop Marcus, who arranged an audience with Pope Francis, who gave the group strong pastoral support, and raised the issue with the Comboni Order.

*"Following the meeting today with leadership of the Comboni Missionaries, the Comboni Survivors Group were deeply moved and believe the journey on the healing process has taken one step further. We recognize that the Comboni Missionaries have responded positively to our request for an acknowledgement of the abuse that was suffered, and we welcome their heartfelt apology. We have committed to continue this path of healing together, which we look forward to in a spirit of collaboration and trust."*

The meeting - also attended by Bishop Marcus and Cardinal Vincent Nichols - is described in these statements:

The Very Reverend Testayfe Tadesse added:



*"On behalf of the Comboni Missionaries (Verona Fathers) I wish to offer my heartfelt apology to each and every individual who suffered abuse at the hands of those who were entrusted with their welfare, safe keeping and schooling at St. Peter Claver College. I extend this apology to family members and loved one who have suffered too. We regret that mistakes were made over the years, and we make the words of our Holy Father our own in asking for forgiveness from those who have suffered so much. I hope this apology demonstrates our sincere wish to bear witness to the plea of the Holy Father to acknowledge the terrible hurt caused by the sexual abuse of minors and to facilitate the journey towards healing and reconciliation."*

He continues to engage with the Survivors Group and has invited them to a further meeting in Rome in the spring, so that their experience can be used in strengthening safeguarding for the Comboni Order. Bede Mullen, spokesman for the group expresses his thanks to all who supported them in their long and difficult struggle.



## THANK YOU ACHILLE RATTI CLIMBING CLUB, FOR SUPPORTING CAFOD'S WORK

*By Angela Powell, CAFOD Leeds & Hallam*

For many years members of the Achille Ratti Climbing club have shared donations raised from their activities and CAFOD is very privileged to be a beneficiary. During this year's annual Mass of Remembrance, the names of deceased members were read out,

and prayers were offered in thanksgiving for their lives and contributions to the legacy of the club. In his homily, Fr Philip O'Conner from Workington preached the significance of mountains as ways in which God has manifested to humanity. The Bible tells of people being called to the holy mountain to learn the ways of peace and justice. Experiences in the mountains can both encourage and challenge us to go forward, to climb upwards, in the right balance of hope and fear.



During Mass, I was reflecting on the context of CAFOD's work. We are entrusted by the bishops to lead on the Catholic Church's response to poverty and relief of suffering internationally. Currently operating in the context of a post-COVID world. There is increased hunger and more people than ever are displaced because they have been forced to leave their homes due to environmental disasters and human conflict. Faced with what can sometimes seem like insurmountable challenges, we could easily lose hope and become fearful, and then I thought about how the Achille Ratti club started. It began as a boys' club in Blackpool operating in the context of two world wars. The founding Bishop wanted to respond to a need to give formative experiences and practical skill training to young men from the diocese of Lancaster and the club took its





name from the mountaineer who became Pope Pius XI, also known as the fearless Pope. Despite the external challenges, it was the spirit of courage and friendship, coupled with a love and respect for mountains that sustained the club. Since the opening of the club's first hut in 1942, it has been able to carry out its activities thanks to the generosity of time, funds and skill-sharing gifted by members. The club continues to offer friendship and refuge in the majesty of the mountains of the Lake District and Snowdonia, it is open to people of all faiths, encouraging communion of friendship and sustenance both in spirit and practice.

It is the same spirit of courage and friendship from which CAFOD draws hope. We are encouraged by courageous partners and communities overseas, those who experience and face up to adversity, by proposing alternative ways to sustain their communities and livelihoods in some of the most challenging circumstances of our time. We give thanks for the friendship of CAFOD supporters who gift their time to organise fundraising and awareness-raising events and inspire others to participate in bringing about a better world for all. To hear more about Achille Ratti, listen to the [radio interview](#) with club member Angela Soper and David Jackson, both members of Leeds parishes, on the subject of sport and faith. Or find out more about [CAFOD's work](#).



## A CHRISTMAS OF DISCONTENT?

*By Joe Burns, Commission Member*

In the current climate of strikes and the cost-of-living crisis we could do a lot worse than reflect on some of the thoughts of Cardinal Manning in the late nineteenth century.

He was influential in the foundational document on Catholic Social Teaching, *Rerum Novarum* (Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour), published in 1891.



*Cardinal Manning (Wikimedia Commons)*

During the 1889 dock strike he gave one of his most famous speeches where he argues:

*"Starving men may be locked out with impunity. The hunger of their wives, the cries of their children, their own want of food, will compel them to come in. It is evident that between a capitalist and a working man there can be no true freedom of contract. The capitalist is invulnerable in his wealth. The working man without bread has no choice but either to agree or to hunger in his hungry home. They forget that when thousands of women and children suffer while they are refusing to grant a penny more in wages, or an hour less in work, there is a wide field of misery caused by their refusal, which prolongs a strike. It is then no private affair, but a public evil which excites the public condemnation."*

Today's economic and social circumstances are rather different to those prevailing at the end of the nineteenth century. Many people are part of the 'gig' economy – effectively self-employed. The trade unions today are strongest in the public sector – so the conflict between 'capital' and 'labour' is a bit different in this context.



In 2017 TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady, spoke at a Vatican conference entitled 'From Populorum Progressio to Laudato Si'. Speaking to The Tablet she commented that what we needed today was a new Cardinal Manning:

*"There is a very strong and practical model from Cardinal Manning. He didn't just make moral pronouncements but rolled up his sleeves and tried to bring about a fair settlement to the dockers' dispute."*

*"When I speak to those young workers of sports direct, McDonalds or Amazon, they feel pretty alone in the world. They are facing employers that are far, far more powerful than the dockers' ones and need somebody to stand by their side and speak up for their rights. I would hope the Church can play a role."*

The basic proposition of Cardinal Manning's speech remains the same: everyone deserves to be paid a 'living wage' – enough to keep themselves and their family. Rerum Novarum goes beyond this to talk about the 'dignity' of the person. This includes not just paying someone a fair wage for work done but the conditions under which they work and the rest periods and time off that they are allowed. We do well to remember this when confronted with so much polemic in the tabloid press.



## **BOYCOTT: LEARNING LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCES IN THE USA**

*By Joe Burns, Commission member*

This year, the Commission sponsored the final film of the Leeds Palestinian Film Festival. It took place in Wheeler Hall, Leeds Cathedral, on 9<sup>th</sup> December and was watched by over 60 people. In addition, Ben Jamal

(Director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign) led a post-film discussion.

The film concerned efforts within state legislatures in the US to pass legislation that meant anyone wanting to do business with state agencies had to sign a declaration that they would not boycott any goods from Israel. It also highlighted the role of various organisations in developing standard wording for such laws and the promotion of such 'boilerplate' legislation.

It was disturbing to watch evangelical Christians saying that Jews would only reclaim Israel in the 'end times' so it was important to support Israel in every way possible.

The film was very well constructed. However, if you just watched the film, it would have been easy to go away thinking that it was just Americans being a bit bonkers and aren't we glad to be living in the UK. Thank goodness that the festival committee had obtained Ben Jamal to provide some input after the film. He detailed how similar legislation is finding its way into the UK.

In February of this year the Government banned boycotts of Israeli companies by public pension funds. PSC took legal action on this, with the support of the unions representing public sector workers. It has very recently been declared unlawful by the Supreme Court.

However, the current Conservative Government still has such anti-boycott legislation waiting to be introduced in Parliament.

Kamel Hawwash, Chair of PSC, has commented, *"The drive to implement an anti-boycott policy suggests that Britain will never hold Israel to account for its crimes, for fear it could upset the Jewish community in the UK. It is worth noting here that members of the*



*Jewish community hold different views on Israel, and many have strong objections to Israel's apartheid policies and oppression of Palestinians."*



The wording of proposed legislation should ring alarm bells far wider than justice for the Palestinian people. It would basically give the Government power to ban boycotts against any country or industry. There is now a growing coalition in the UK to fight this proposed legislation. This coalition includes PSC and other supporters of justice for Palestinians but also includes faith leaders, environmental organisations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth as well as many trade unions. It is only too probable that such legislation would be used to ban boycotts of fossil fuel companies.

Perhaps we should all be a bit more concerned about it???

For more details see:

[www.righttoboycott.org.uk](http://www.righttoboycott.org.uk)



Congratulations to Commission member **Dr Ann Marie Mealey** on her appointment as **Director of Mission** at Leeds Trinity University. We look forward to working with you more closely in your new role.

## THE POOR PAY THE PRICE

*by John Battle, Commission Chair*

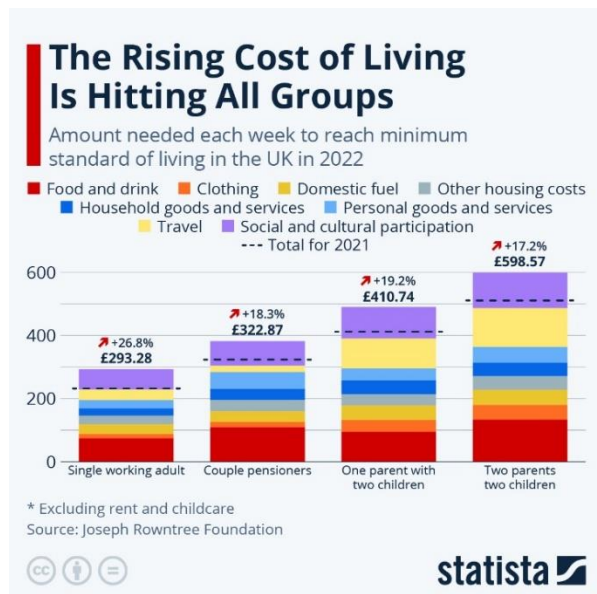
I vividly recall a mother at a meeting of MP election candidates challenging them over the levels of tax and benefits. One of the panel tried to brush her off, declaring tax and benefits *"so complicated it was a matter best left to financial experts"*. She interjected tellingly; *"those of us who have to pay the price can do the arithmetic, why can't you?"*.

As nearly seven million households of the poorest people are already paying over the odds for basic food, goods and services, there is, according to the Centre for Social Justice, already a "poverty premium" which costs families £480 a year for higher food, prices in supermarkets, higher interest costs on credit, and higher energy costs and that was before the recent autumn emergency budget announcements. What's more, the pressure on the budgets of the poorest is a result of years of austerity as well as rising inflation. The Office of National Statistics shows the price of budget food in supermarkets rising by 17% in the year to September. Nearly one in three lone parents (and 10% of lone parents use foodbanks), are reported as now skipping meals. NHS data reveals that in 2021/2022, over 10,000 patients were so malnourished they needed hospital care, an increase over 3,700 the previous year. The Food Foundation charity recently reported that four million children were living in homes without adequate access to food. Meanwhile, more and more are calling on overstretched foodbanks.

Encouragingly, there was pressure to upgrade universal credit benefits in line with inflation and, to be fair, despite the worst fears, the welfare budget was largely protected by the Chancellor's decision to



increase them by the current 10.1% inflation figure, though a week later inflation rose by another 1% and is now projected to rise further with more interest rises. As benefits and state pensions were generally protected, the budget deficit (largely the hole generated by the Truss and Kwarteng experiment) has been pushed forward into major national department cuts in the future (in the 2024 financial year). However, the pressure on local government has been increased. Local councils can raise more council tax but they are under pressure to provide more caring services, so they have to make cuts elsewhere, not least to that voluntary sector support to local communities. In other words, there is real pressure on support services to the poor.



Last but not least, though there is some direct cash support for energy costs for 3.8 million family budgets who now pay more than 30% on their fuel costs (up from 1.6 million) and the 7.5 million paying a fifth of their income on fuel, it still leaves those 4.5 million on prepayment meter in real difficulties. These include those on the lowest incomes and benefits and in rented properties who pay using a top up card, fob

key or app. But they pay in advance and a higher tariff and made to repay any debts deducted from each top up leaving people with less money for their current energy needs. Recently debt agents employed by energy companies are increasingly using magistrate warrants to forcibly enter homes and put families on prepayment meters as a means of debt collection. The impact in increasingly dangerous self-disconnection. Citizens Advice bureau have joined others demanding an increase of energy help for the poorest who now have to beg for meter money. Windfall taxing energy suppliers who are still paying huge profits over to shareholders would go some way to redressing the energy inequalities but so would a tax reform that tackled 'non dom' avoiders, profit-rich banks and shareholders.

For the poorest, things will get worse after next April but so it will for those above universal credit faced with mortgage increase which will draw their incomes into the classic "poverty trap" just above benefit support levels but drastically income squeezed. By April around 8.4 million households will be in fuel poverty. That is the immediate crisis that needs radically addressing.






As Churches, continuing as best we can to support food and clothing banks, pressing for enhanced school meal provision and putting on regular social activities in our church halls (to provide winter warm spaces) is imperative. But to tackle deep and increasing inequalities in income and wealth over recent years a much more radical overhaul perhaps rooted in the guidelines of our Catholic social teaching tradition is what we need to work for.







## EVENTS

 <b>Fri 19<sup>th</sup> Dec</b>	<b>Christmas Kindness Volunteering</b> SVP Centre: 10am – 2:30pm <i>SVP are hosting special volunteer days over the festive period and we'd love for you to be involved in our Christmas Kindness campaign.</i> <i>Join us as we get festive and invite you to help with: Gift wrapping, Making up hampers, Writing cards, Sorting stock &amp; more</i> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/events/648425233611970/648425236945303">https://www.facebook.com/events/648425233611970/648425236945303</a>
 <b>Sun 15<sup>th</sup> Jan</b>	<b>Peace Sunday</b> All day Will Peace Sunday be marked in some way in your parish? Why not suggest the masses include special prayers for peace and perhaps some of the hymns could reflect this? <a href="https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2023/#:~:text=We%20are%20still%20eagerly%20awaiting,Message%20for%20World%20Peace%20Day.">https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2023/#:~:text=We%20are%20still%20eagerly%20awaiting,Message%20for%20World%20Peace%20Day.</a>
 <b>Tues 17<sup>th</sup> Jan</b>	<b>The Challenges of Laudato Si?</b> Online: 7:30pm – 8:45pm Many Catholics may have heard about the Pope's encyclical <i>Laudato Si</i> which is focussed on the need to care for our Common Home. But what does this mean practically for parishes and dioceses across the country? Join us for this Zoom conversation with the Rt Rev John Arnold, Bishop of Salford Simply email <a href="mailto:jandp@dioceseofleeds.org.uk">jandp@dioceseofleeds.org.uk</a> and we will send you the link to join.
 <b>Sat 21<sup>st</sup> Jan</b>	<b>We Rise – Global Justice Now Youth Network</b> Bridge 5 Mill: 1:30pm – 6:45pm We Rise is a free gathering for young people (under 30) organised by Global Justice Now. It will be a day of political education, creative workshops and movement building. It will cover climate reparations, migrant justice, activism and more. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/we-rise-manchester-tickets-410382383757">https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/we-rise-manchester-tickets-410382383757</a>
 <b>Sat 28<sup>th</sup> Jan</b>	<b>Just Jesus</b> St George's Church: 9:30am – 4pm If you want to try a different flavour of Christian thought about action for Justice then get yourself along to this day which is free to attend. It is being organised through Lighthouse West Yorkshire. Speakers include Katie Dowds and John Swales (of Christian Climate Action, Leeds) who are both associated with this church. <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/just-jesus-tickets-425847349887?fbclid=IwAR1O99B57EqQC5g8GOPuvAghUDDWU8cQYI2RS5W8YMXj_ocqmHNBxbR9trE">https://www.eventbrite.com/e/just-jesus-tickets-425847349887?fbclid=IwAR1O99B57EqQC5g8GOPuvAghUDDWU8cQYI2RS5W8YMXj_ocqmHNBxbR9trE</a>

***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.***