



LISTENING TO THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

By John Battle, Commission Chair

The Listening ear of St Benedict



Saturday 16th Dec (11am to 1pm at Wheeler Hall) there is an open invitation to a "special event " of our Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission to reflect on who we are now and our purpose and mission in the Diocese in the light of the Church's " Synodal Process" which Pope Francis has got underway with a recent first session at the Vatican.

It couldn't be more timely. The first decades of this twenty first century have seen the breakdown of the optimisms of globalisation and democratisation (remember the hubristic declaration of "the end of history" and a new American century?). Countries have retreated back into defensive nationalism and new outbreaks of violence, conflicts, terrorism and are scarring our times - not least in producing new generations of refugees. Economic developments are of increasing inequalities, insecure work and deepening poverty and disenfranchisement as democracies come under stress. The answers of traditional "*surface politics*" no longer cut through. This leads to disillusionment and despair - particularly for the poor. The climate crisis deepens internationally with devastating environmental impacts worldwide. Yet, governments step back from seriously tackling it - jeopardising the future for generations. Here in the UK we face a coming General Election .

Two years ago Pope Francis initiated a Synod of the Church proposing a "*long process of listening and discernment...open to all the people of God; no one being excluded to journey together*

under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as missionary disciples" . The Bishops' letter to the People of God at the close of the first Synod session this October stresses that we address "*the context of a world in crisis , whose wounds and scandalous inequalities resonate painfully in our hearts infusing our work with a particular gravity.... reflecting on our common home where the cries of the earth and the poor are becoming increasingly urgent"* .

We are all invited to join in the synodal process which is now a call to participate in " synodal discernment " . The Church's tradition of social teaching has long advocated the " see judge act" method of reflecting and taking action; the Second Vatican Council stressed the need to read " the signs of the times"; " discernment " has become a key word in our Catholic practice. But too often this method of " see-judge-act" and "discernment" has been regarded as an individual and personal process . The hallmark of the present Synod is the need to develop " collective discernment " - a coming together to read the signs of the times".



NEWSLETTER December 2023

Central to this method of "collective discernment" is real "listening", a practical skill neglected and devalued in contemporary discourse (not least in political and social practice). An adviser to Pope Paul VI during the Second Vatican Council which emphasised "renewal in the Spirit" ("aggiornamento") urged the accompanying need for "approfondimento continuo" - a "continuous deepening".

Our task now is one of joining to the Synodal process of journeying (synod means "walking together") through our troubled times is to get together urgently. At the conclusion of the first session there is an invitation of the Synod Bishops "to the People of God" (letter Oct 25 2023) to *"deepen the listening ... to those who have been denied the right to speak or feel excluded, ... to victims of racism in all its forms ... to the enthusiasm of youth, to their questions and pleas, ... to the dreams, the wisdom and the memory of elderly people ... the world in which we live and which*

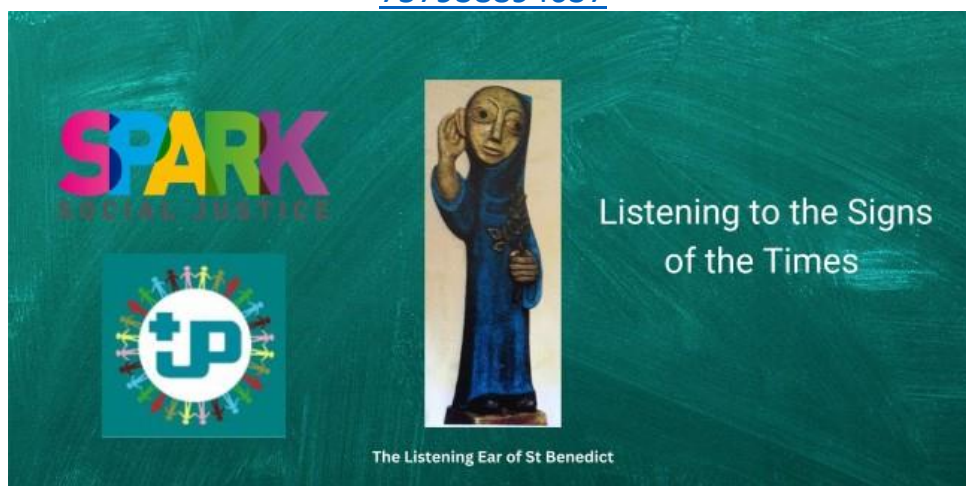
we are called to love and serve even with its contradictions demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission".

So how does the Justice and Peace Commission, and everyone in the Diocese, develop our work of addressing poverty in our society, press for action on the climate crisis; campaign for nonviolence and peace, address persistent racism, and regard young people not as "the future" but as "the now of the Church" (in Pope Francis's words) - as our special Spark Justice project works to deliver?

This open session of "collective discernment" and "deepening listening" - coming together in the shared presence of the Holy Spirit - is our participation in the new Synod process to help us all better address the challenges of our troubling times and develop our actions.

There's still time to join us(Just!) at Wheeler Hall 11am – 1pm Saturday 16 December

Please register to attend as we will provide lunch at the end of the event
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/listening-to-the-signs-of-the-times-tickets-757938894637>





A call for solidarity and dignity for Filipino health care workers in the UK

by. Rafael Antonio, Filipino University Student in Leeds

Coming to the United Kingdom was not a simple decision. Like many other Filipinos, who have sought a higher education in countries not of our own, we are considered “fortunate” unlike our counterparts (the OFW – overseas Filipino workers) who instead go abroad for work. Indeed, regardless of intent, both the Filipino student and worker must go through the tedious, expensive, and time-consuming process of securing proper documentation before being granted entry – and then come to the painful goodbye, in which we say goodbye to all we have known and to all we have loved, for how long, we do not know.

Why is that, then? Why would so many bright minds and talented able-bodied workers come to a country not of their own? The answer is as simple as it is sad: Corruption in their homeland. True, many have come abroad to escape it, while others, forced to leave because of it. One can only imagine the surprise and disappointment of some students and workers of Filipino descent when the very same corruption made its presence known in a place they went to, to avoid it.

During May of this year, the city of London was greeted with a bus ad that featured Nurse May Parsons, a British woman of Filipino descent, which celebrated her services to the NHS and achieving a milestone of administering one of the first Covid19 vaccines. “We give the world our best. The Philippines.” the ad proudly stated, or more likely, deliberately misconstrued the current state of the nursing profession in the Philippines.



Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons License

In truth, the Philippines is currently facing a nursing shortage due to low wages and awful working conditions. This depressing state of work was made more apparent during the COVID19 pandemic, so much so that the Filipino government banned the deployments of nurses bound abroad between April and December of 2020 as a solution to the shortage.

For two consecutive years, the Philippines was ranked to be the worst place to be in during the pandemic. During this period, Filipino nurses were forced to work and operate under deplorable and slave-like conditions. It was not uncommon to hear reports of the various ways they were mistreated in their own country and by their own government – forced to take vaccines of questionable origins, made to work overtime while wearing diapers, the mandatory use of pseudo-medical paraphernalia bought by the government from organizations linked organized crime, denied their wages and payments promised to them at the start of the deployment ban, and the worst fate of the most unlucky being infected by the virus



NEWSLETTER December 2023

itself and left to die .(5)

The claim that the Philippines is “giving its best” is as striking as it is depressing when one compares the two different realities a nurse from the Philippines may experience. The Covid19 pandemic is now over, but the Philippines is planning to hire thousands of unlicensed nurses to address its shortage.(6)

¹The ad, in truth, was a marketing campaign by the government of Filipino president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. whose family institutionalized the presence of not only Filipino nurses but of all Filipinos working overseas.(7) It was in the 1970s, that his father the Dictator Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law – and began bankrupting the country by pocketing the country’s money and international donations, while his military forces caused the deaths and torture of the thousands of who would dare speak out or was suspected of speaking out. As a “solution” to the crisis he brought on, the export of cheap Filipino labor was designed and survives to this day. Millions of Filipinos, since then have said goodbye to their country and families, sacrificing their time and gambling their safety as the institution has become an outlet of human trafficking and abuse both by their working agencies and their employers.(9)

In a better world, the presence of Filipinos working overseas would be done out of a genuine desire to offer their services and help make the world a better place – rather than being forced to leave their native land and families due to the corruption of their leaders and the appalling working conditions that are offered to them. A better world is indeed still possible. But it needs to begin with us. Two Catholic Social

teachings have already laid out the best way of how to make this possible. We must recognize the “*dignity of the worker*” and practice “*solidarity*”.

In simple terms, while indeed we must recognize the complementary service/s of Filipinos in healthcare, we mustn’t patronize them in the same manner of the administration of the Marcoses. Instead, we must ensure that their rights both as workers and humans are respected, recognised and fulfilled. By solidarity, we must understand the weight of their efforts, by familiarizing and being more aware of their history and how, we may have overlooked their presence and services to a country not of their own.

For a more fully referenced version of this article please see the online version on our website:-

<https://www.leedsjp.org.uk/2023/12/05/5-dec-filipino-workers-in-the-uk-a-call-for-solidarity-and-dignity/>

SPARK ADVENT EVENT AT WIBSEY

On 1st December SPARK supported Lucy from Mary Mother of God parish to lead a meeting with the youth group there about refugees and asylum seekers.

Parish priest, Fr Paul Grogan, commented on Facebook:

“Increasingly, we are drawing in support to vary the formation that we offer to our young people on Friday evenings. Last Friday, our very own Lucy Hollerer - freshly returned from her studies in primary education at Liverpool University - led the group in a



NEWSLETTER December 2023

discussion on asylum seekers and refugees, linking this to Catholic Social Teaching."



Kathy Shaw, Outreach and Engagement Manager from the diocesan SPARK Social Justice Project, takes up the story: "Lucy asked the group to think about what 'home' meant to them and to imagine if their safety and that sense of community was lost because of war, persecution or natural disaster. Lucy told the group that the Catholic Church teaches us that anyone whose life is threatened has the right to protection, and that all people have the right to live a dignified life in their homeland. She made the link to the story of Christmas where the Holy Family fled from Herod, volunteers in the group read part of the Scripture before agreeing we all want migrants and refugees to be part of our community and live in a place where they can find peace and safety."

A Christmas Quiz taught us all lots about the different customs around the world at this time of year, and everyone enjoyed the craft



activity

making snowflakes and a paper chain using Happy Christmas in different languages. Fr Paul additionally commented: "These can be used to decorate the Church, making sure

Is there someone in your parish who might organise an event like this??

You can contact Kathy by emailing sparks.jandp@dioceseofleeds.org.uk

everyone feels welcome and part of the parish community. Thanks Kathy and Lucy for your input. This is state-of-the-art stuff!"



The Second Meeting of the State Parties to the TPNW – From our own Correspondent!

By Matthew Maslen

From the 27th - 1st December, the Second Meeting of State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW 2MSP) was held in the UN Headquarters in New York. Thanks to funding from the SPARK Project, and a grant from the CPEF (Christian Peace Education Fund), I was able to attend in person as a Youth Delegate affiliated with Youth for TPNW and the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).



NEWSLETTER December 2023

It was an incredible week. I was surrounded by representatives of so many international organisations who work tirelessly for the fundamental shift we need in our global security outlook. The nuclear deterrence theory is sold to us as a guarantee of safety - that the only answer to the threat of nuclear weapons, is more nuclear weapons. To me, this seems ludicrous, and history has shown it to be false on many occasions, but it is the foundation of nuclear war theory and upholds so much of our global security rhetoric. Nuclear weapons are taught to us as a part of history, a threat of years gone by. Yet, the reality is that the nuclear threat has never been greater.

So, taking part in the MSP as a member of civil society was a privilege for me. ICAN is a Nobel Peace Prize winner and being a part of their team for a week was such a fantastic opportunity. I participated in workshops, attended seminars, volunteered as a CSO runner to the main MSP, helped to set up meetings and exhibitions, and took part in a peaceful march. I met people I have admired for a long time whose work has been vital in bringing about the Ban Treaty.

The Ban Treaty is unique for its focus on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons, as well as for its positive obligations on states parties to environmental remediation and victim assistance. This meant that much of the week's discussions revolved around the legacy of nuclear testing and the testimonies of Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors) and nuclear testing victims.

Hearing first-hand the horrors of nuclear weapons, and being reminded of the lasting impacts that are still felt to this day, kept fresh in our minds the urgency of nuclear

abolition. I am part of the last generation of people who will hear the stories of Hibakusha in their own words. I feel immensely privileged to have heard from them in person. But the Hibakusha do not relive the horrors of their experience to simply remind us of what a nuclear weapon is capable of: it is to campaign for nuclear abolition.

As Mr Shiro Suzuki, the Mayor of Nagasaki said, *"I believe it is their [Hibakusha's] voices which have served as the real deterrent for 78 years"*.

The only defence against nuclear weapons is nuclear abolition. I will end as Mr Mimaki Toshiyuki, a Hibakusha, did each time he gave a speech: *"No more Hiroshima. No more Nagasaki. No more Hibakusha. No more Nuclear Weapons. No more war."*



What can we do about the conflict in Gaza?

By Carol Burns, Leeds Diocese Pax Christi grp

'If we don't learn to live together, we are doomed, this land will be our graveyard' -

these are the words of a representative of the Parents Circle Family Forum.

[\(https://www.theparentscircle.org/en/pcff-home-page-en/\)](https://www.theparentscircle.org/en/pcff-home-page-en/)

As helpless bystanders, sometimes we can feel the same. There is no solution unless there is negotiation, But the journey is going to be a hard one.

The cruelty and violence perpetrated by Hamas on the 7th of October was truly shocking and clearly has no justification. I like others felt especially sorrowful that some of those murdered, supported the Palestinians in the Gaza strip in very practical



NEWSLETTER December 2023

ways like giving lifts to Gaza residents who are going to hospital.

Then this atrocity was followed by the unprecedented attacks on civilians in Gaza, justified by the Netanyahu government as destroying Hamas. There is no question that the current Israeli government is breaking international law daily. It has been very difficult at times to watch the scenes at hospitals on the Gaza strip and most distressing the premature babies left without any medical help.

'Our hearts are breaking as we realize that to Jews this violence [feels like a continuation of the Holocaust](#) and to [Palestinians it feels like a new Nakba](#)', (Marie Dennis, Director of the Catholic Non- Violence Initiative, Pax Christi International)

October 7th didn't come out of the blue, it is in the context of the occupation of Palestinian land since 1967, the growth of illegal settlements and the imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli jails and the arming of Israel especially by the Americans.

While the words eyes are on Gaza, violence continues in the West Bank as settlers attack Palestinian villages seemly with impunity

What can we do in the face of this terrible conflict?:

- Never give up hope, as Christians however hard the circumstances, if we believe in the incarnation, that Jesus is with us even in the worst suffering possible, if we believe in the resurrection then there is always hope.
- Listen to all those who are suffering from whichever side, educate ourselves about the facts, and use many different sources and be alert to fake images on social media.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-67177744/>

- Get involved in public solidarity actions e.g demonstrations, Women in Black (in Bradford and Leeds). Watching a documentary about Marwen Bargouti, a Palestinian Political leader in prison now for 20 years, this week, I was very moved by his family saying how important international solidarity was, to know that ordinary people supported the Palestinians
- Learn about support and share the many, many examples of non-violence resistance by Palestinian and Israeli groups.
- Support humanitarian organisations working in Gaza such as Medical Aid for Palestinians. CAFOD also has work in Gaza.



The baby Jesus from a crib built with rubble from bombed buildings in Gaza



SPARK Social Justice -a Leeds J&P Commission project

Web www.leedsjp.org.uk <mailto:jandp@dioceseofleeds.org.uk>




NEWSLETTER December 2023

I'll end with the brave words of Maoz Inon the son of two Israeli peace activists, Bilha and Yakovi Inon, who were murdered on Oct. 7: ***"Let's call for peace. Let's call for hope. Let's call for a complete ceasefire. Let's call for building bridges. ... We must build the future, and this future must be based on equality, on partnership, on peace."***

For more information and some additional links to more information, please see the online version of this article by using this link:

<https://www.leedsjp.org.uk/2023/12/11/11-dec-what-can-we-do-about-the-conflict-in-gaza/>

 Sat 16 Dec	<p>'Listening to the Signs of the Times' in Yorkshire <i>Wheeler Hall, Leeds Cathedral, St Anne's Street, 11:00-13:00</i> Join us to reflect together about the state of the world, and what action the Gospels are calling us to take. Please use the link to register as lunch will be available at the end. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/listening-to-the-signs-of-the-times-tickets-757938894637</p>
 Sat 16 Dec	<p>Film Presentation: 'We Dare to Dream' <i>Hyde Park Picture House, Brudenell Road, Leeds LS6 1JD 17:30-20:00</i> The story of refugee athletes from Iran, Syria, South Sudan and Cameroon who swim, run and fight their way to opportunity and safety in host nations across the world. Book a Ticket: https://hpph.co.uk/films/we-dare-to-dream</p>
 Sat 09 Mar	<p>Care for Creation: Commitments, Action and Participation <i>Venue in central Wigan (to be confirmed) 10:00 – 15:30</i> A day organised by Liverpool J&P and the Archdiocese of Liverpool. Find out what is going on about Climate Change in churches across the North of England. Keynote speakers include Bishop John Arnold and Sr Margaret Atkins. Follow the link for more info and to sign up https://archdioceseofliverpool.churchsuite.com/events/vr8p9ggi</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.

EVENTS AND THINGS TO DO



We wish all our supporters a blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with renewed commitment to the work for Justice & Peace