



LISTENING TO THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

By Matty Maslen, Newsletter Editor; Sara Forrest, Commission member; and Bronagh Daly, Faith and Creativity Lead at LCI.

At the end of last year, we held an event at Wheeler Hall in Leeds. The title was 'Listening to the Signs of the Times'.

To begin the event, John Battle read a prayer which called for the Lord to "come set our hearts ablaze with hope".

John then gave a short introduction to the day ahead.

He outlined the three main challenges currently facing the commission:

1. **Engagement**
2. **Realistic Action**
3. **Capacity**

John asked us to keep these in mind as we engaged in our group discussions. We were split into groups and allocated to a table where there were a number of A3 sheets of paper awaiting us, each of which had a different question for us to discuss.

Each of these questions tied into one of the three main challenges John had outlined, and as the prayer he had read out at the beginning asked, encouraged us to be hopeful in overcoming them.

Below, we've collated some reflections from attendees:

Sara's Reflection:

My group of four were born in different decades and had lived in three continents. The guided questions took us to a place of deep listening and meaningful discussion.

Our interests were different – environment, corruption, poverty. We were united by a belief that Jesus calls us to love and care for the world. We agreed our world needs healing. And that media reports tend to oversimplify complex situations. 'Solutions' tend to be based on 'us or them', winners and losers. We felt called to make a difference but were unsure how to go about it.

We identified locally led change as effective, but it is often unreported and hard to find. You have to look for it because algorithms chase hits/likes/shares, they favour big organisations. Change that is just succeeds because it is born of including the marginalised. It is practical, often small scale. When other people see it works, they are more likely to change too.

Lunch provided an opportunity to mix with other participants. It was so good to be with working age people!

There was a real spirit of sharing and common purpose. I felt reassured that other people were also looking to express their faith through action and look forward to the next event.

Bronagh's Reflection:

Drawing on the art of listening



I have been a steering group member of SPARK Social Justice for several years, and the creativity built into the delivery model has untapped potential. Bringing young people together to share their ideas, passions and concerns about inequality and social justice through drama, discussion and video content offers a new way to promote dialogue for change.



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A doodle of a gift, wrapped up with a red bow, created a focal point for more in-depth conversations when someone talked about how important their gifts are but sometimes go unnoticed. Students expanded on the 'gift' idea and talked about the link the gifts of the holy spirit have with their desire for a change to the way young people from marginalised groups are increasingly being welcomed into the university union as reps and ambassadors.

The amalgam of doodles, typography and symbols across the 3 pages offered a new dynamic to the workshops. I reflected on our primordial need as humans to leave a mark. Just as the paint blown against hands in the Gargas Caves 14,000 years ago, the earliest mark making recorded we left a mark that we came together, we created a visual representation of over 40 people coming together to record the hopes and aspirations

of young people and their desire to one day become leaders in social justice.

Before the Victorian era, many Christians were illiterate. Stained glass windows in churches and carvings in wood or stone helped to communicate the Good News of the gospels and offered instruction for salvation. Our graphic notetaking follows in that tradition. We connected through a combination of imagery and words, colour and space.

Something special happens to our spirit when we connect with the visual arts. Paintings and photographs can help convey emotions that are often failed by the written word, we are in the main visual learners. Drawing on the art of listening, slowing down the note-taking process to pictorial form takes time.

Representing the spoken word as image takes courage. When we share our wisdom in visual form, we connect across languages and cultures.





This intergenerational gathering engaged in the graphic note taking methodology and embraced it with ease. Graphic note taking offered revelation and intrigue.

The images are long lasting and, in a way, become sacred. We hold images differently to how we hold workshop notes in written form. I have been informed that the images we created will be utilised as either a learning resources, or pleasant backdrop for future SPARK Social Justice events. The illustrations of the conversations I created will act as a visual shortcut offering the didactic message of ‘Lead, Empower and Change’ to a wider audience and help to promote the visual arts as a conduit for learning as a faithful city.

Matty’s Reflection:

As the youngest attendee, I really enjoyed the intergenerational discussions that the event fostered. It can often be difficult to find the spaces to talk to people outside our own bubbles, be that age-related, ideology-related, lived-experiences, or otherwise.

In the group I was in, this fed into the discussions we held. We talked about the role of the clergy in empowering and encouraging us to bring about meaningful social change.

When we reached the stage of the day where we were asked to sum up our group discussions in 3 words, we first allowed everyone to choose a word to see if we had any common themes. Inevitably, there were: ‘dialogue, broadening, and bridge-building’ were all mentioned. This notion of stepping outside our own perspectives has been my key take-away from the day.

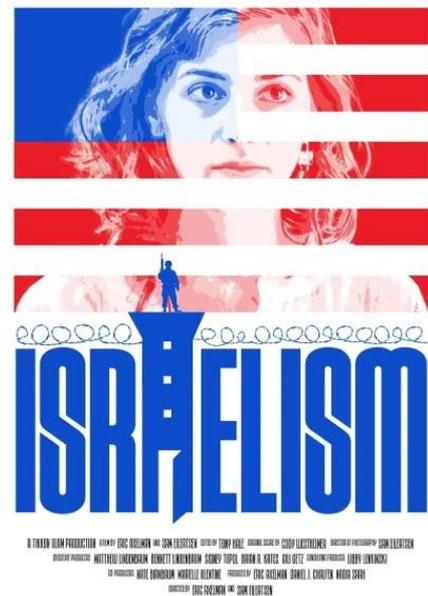
As John Battle had said to us right at the start: **“deeper listening all the time”** – and we cannot be truly listening if we are simply waiting for our turn to talk.

PARTNERSHIP WITH FILM FESTIVAL GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

By Joe Burns, Commission member

Our involvement with the last film in this year’s Palestinian Film Festival, on 9th December, was sponsored by SPARK Social Justice – as there are always many younger people in the audience. This year it was sold out. The film was called Israelism and explored how many young Jewish people in the USA are brought up to revere the state of Israel without being fully aware of the situation with regard to Palestinians. It follows the stories of some of these people and how they reject the stories they have grown up with after seeing the situation for themselves on visits to Israel.

For us, as organisers, the event was not without its own drama! We were due to have a post-film discussion with the film’s Director. However, two days prior to screening he had to cancel because his parents were ill. Thanks to the efforts of Tricia Griffin, Film Festival committee member and longtime campaigner about Palestinian rights, we were





able to have the discussion led by Robert Cohen, a writer and blogger on Jewish affairs who lives in Leeds.



In some ways, it was better to have Robert speaking as he was able to give a UK perspective on what was depicted in the film. People asked some hard questions of him – comparing the reaction of people in this country when UK Jews have gone to fight in the Israeli Defence Force against the reaction to Muslims who went to fight for IS. However, it was very striking how the questions were phrased in a respectful way and the discussion was a genuine exploration of positions and issues where it is almost impossible to get beneath the surface in the mainstream media. We are very grateful that Robert took the opportunity to share his expert knowledge.

attend the Second Meeting of State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2MSP TPNW).

For this article I've written a Q&A with myself, using questions that people have tended to ask me when it comes up...

What is the TPNW, and why was the conference held in New York?

The TPNW is the international treaty which made nuclear weapons illegal. It's more colloquially known as 'The Ban Treaty' because that's what it did: it banned nuclear weapons. When a treaty is first made, countries sign and ratify it.

To **sign** a treaty is to show willing to continue the treaty's development and a wish to be involved in the process.

To **ratify** is to go further, to consent to be legally bound by the treaty law.



Then, once 50 states have ratified it, it officially comes into force. For the TPNW this happened in 2021. Once this had happened,

(The Festival Committee are re-screening the film at Hyde Park picture theatre in Burley, Leeds in February. See the film's website for more details of how to stream it – well worth watching! <https://www.israelismfilm.com/>)

NUCLEAR BAN WEEK NEW YORK

By Matty Maslen, Newsletter Editor; photo credit to Darren Ornitz, ICAN

From the 27th of November to the 1st of December last year, I had the privilege to

Universalisation – the process of making all states join the treaty. But also, the process of normalising the rationale of the TPNW.

Positive obligations – the TPNW not only obligates states not to do things but obligates them *to do* things i.e. environmental remediation and victim assistance.

Complementation – the TPNW is not an isolated treaty but builds on previous ones, most directly on article 6 of the NPT.



the next stage was to hold a meeting with all those who had signed. This meeting occurred in 2022 in Vienna. Just over a year later, the second meeting was convened, with Mexico as the presiding state.

The meeting was held in New York because the United Nations Headquarters are there. Therefore, although there are other UN locations, such as in Vienna and Geneva, it is in New York that the most countries have a permanent representative.

However, this is not to say that holding the meeting in New York was the most convenient location. Many people, particularly civil society members, had issues obtaining visas and funding, with many ultimately unable to attend.

What was your role?

Originally, I was given a place to attend the 2MSP as a Youth Delegate through the organisation [Youth for TPNW](#). This is the same organisation I attended the 1MSP with. On the Tuesday we had our official 'Youth MSP', held in the UN Church Centre. Here we had Q&A sessions with panels on topics such as universalisation, positive obligations, and complementation, which were the 'buzzwords' of the week. These 3 concepts were consistently revisited over the week because they are what makes the TPNW unique among treaties on nuclear weapons.

The second half of the Youth MSP consisted of smaller group discussions on what our role is in the disarmament movement, the barriers that currently face us from fulfilling them, and how we can overcome these.

As the official youth events did not fill the entire week, I also applied to the [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear](#)

[Weapons \(ICAN\)](#) to volunteer with them on the days I was free. I was given a number of roles across the week:



On the Sunday, the Campaigners Meeting was held at Brick Church, the day before the official MSP began. It was a chance for members of civil society to come together and learn about the work that other organisations had been doing over the past year, to hear about the research people have produced, and to gain clarity in what the expectations were for the week ahead. I was able to attend this meeting as a volunteer on the catering team. This gave me a chance to meet hundreds of inspiring people (everyone needed a coffee at some point!). This meeting was actually one of my favourite parts of the week because it was the 'campaigners meeting'. In other words, the people doing the groundwork in advocating for, and shaping what is still a very young treaty.

Throughout the rest of the week, I helped as a runner to the main MSP, giving me front-row access to the room (the Trusteeship Council Chamber) where state and civil society representatives gave their statements. It was so exciting to be in the middle of official UN-business.

What talks did you attend?



There were also periods over the course of the week when I did not have an official job to do. I used this time to attend any side-events that piqued my interest. ('Side-events' refers to any event that was not the main MSP in the Trusteeship Council Chamber.)

I attended a range of talks, including:

- Voices of Civil Society
- Urgency of Disarmament
- Prevention is the Only Cure
- Influencing Nuclear Weapon States.

Experts in various fields contributed to these events, giving me deeper insight into interdisciplinary approaches to nuclear abolition.

Did you attend any events outside the UN building?

As well as talks I also attended other events such as the '[New Manhattan Project Concert: A Concert for Nuclear Abolition](#)'. This was held on the Monday evening in a theatre room in the Japan Society. It was a multi-media concert with a mix of theatre, film and music including a performance by 'MARK Harmony', a group of young singers from the Marshall Islands, whose people and lands are some of the most affected by nuclear testing. The evening was incredibly moving and immersive and is something that I will remember forever.

Another event which I attended was a Mass dedicated to Dorothy Day. I was invited by members of Pax Christi whom I met at the conference and Brendan Fay, a well-known Catholic nuclear abolition and LGBTQ activist. The Mass was given by the Most Rev. John C. Wester, the Archbishop of Santa Fe, also a nuclear disarmament activist. It was really invigorating to see a member of the clergy using their platform and authority to

encourage people to act on an issue which is so important. It really hit home how rare it is for us to be called upon in church to take action other than prayer.

We also held a non-violent, peaceful march and rally through the streets of Manhattan, stopping outside various embassies and official buildings, and held a photoshoot with our banners and posters around the city.

What was the outcome of 2MSP?

One of the most significant decisions made during the 2MSP was that a focus will now be made on [delegitimising the deterrence theory](#) as the basis for global security. This is a huge step forward for the international community and the nuclear abolition movement, to have the entire justification for nuclear weapons being questioned.

There was a consensus that the risks posed by nuclear weapons are continuing to increase. This is the result of four main trends

1. Increasing

Nuclear weapon states have been – despite their supposed commitments to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – increasing their nuclear arsenals and their financial budgets for nuclear weapons.

2. Modernising

Nuclear weapon states have been modernising their nuclear weapons arsenals – creating new systems and weapons.

3. Increase in dual-use

There has been an increasingly blurred line between nuclear weapons and conventional weapons.

4. Decrease in arms control

Across the globe we are seeing a decrease in the checks and balances on the arms industry and its products.



that we are seeing across the international community, but particularly from nuclear weapon states. These are shown in the box above.

The 2MSP focused on centring the affected communities. Since the TPNW has a unique focus on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons, through articles 6 and 7, it follows that the voices of those who are most exposed to these impacts were placed at the centre of discussions.

However, there was also a large presence of states who were there merely as observers – meaning they are not state parties to the treaty as they have not ratified it.

What now for the TPNW?

Currently, we are in the ‘intersessional period’. This is just what it says on the tin: the period between sessions, or between meetings. The next meeting (3MSP) will take place in March 2025, also in New York, but this time Kazakhstan will preside.

Over this period, the states work on what was agreed at the end of the 2MSP. One of the commitments made was that there be an increase in research through the continuation of the informal working groups which were set up as part of the Vienna Action Plan following 1MSP. Between the 1MSP and the 2MSP, these groups went away and carried out research, which was reported back in New York; the same will happen now. One of the ‘youth statements’ asks that youth not be given simply a ‘token place’ within the treaty, but rather that we are involved at all levels as “*article 8 necessitates our inclusion*”. For this reason, the statement asked that young people make-up 20% of each working group.

One of the major developments we will be watching for in this intersessional period, is the introduction of a voluntary international trust fund. This fund would be used for victim assistance and environmental remediation.



What do we do now?

In this time, between now and the next MSP, we need to work to increase awareness of the TPNW so that we can create a movement to lobby the UK government to sign and ratify the treaty – or at least to agree to attend the 3MSP as an observer. The government will not do this of their own accord, we must put pressure on them.

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IN SOMEONE ELSE’S SHOES

By Sara Forrest, Commission Member

Imagine...

You are a care worker in Africa. You hear that you can get a visa to work as a UK Carer, earning a higher salary than in your home country.

You and your family scrimp and save for a Care Worker Visa for you and Dependent Visas for your partner and children. And the cash you need to bring with you to fulfil the terms of the Visa.



You arrive in the UK. You work a for a while. Then there is no more work available through your Visa sponsor.

Your family have already settled in a rented home. Your children go to local schools. You cannot claim UK benefits.

Your partner is free to work any job but the pay is low. Not enough to pay the rent, power, rates, food and other living expenses. You need to be earning, but you can only work for your Visa sponsor.

The money you brought with you runs out.

You fear deportation. Your Visa sponsor then offers you work over 100 miles from your family. You must pay a daily charge to rent a room in a colleague's house in order to work there. You work very long hours with few days off. You don't see your family for weeks.

BUT you can pay the bills.

Exploitation like this is called Modern Day Slavery.

The hostile approach of the Home Office to migrants creates the fear which enables the Sponsor to exploit the care workers.

Charities now advise that modern-day slaves do not provide their name and address to the Slavery Helplines as this may lead to deportation.

We thought we had abolished slavery. Sadly, it's still with us.

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CAFOD LENT APPEAL

By Angela Powell, CAFOD Community Participation Co-ordinator

Helping people like James to fish safely and feed their families.

Lent begins early this year, with Ash

Wednesday falling on 14th February and CAFOD's Family Fast day is on Friday 23rd February. Our focus story is on a young man called James Pyne, who is a fisherman in Liberia.

His father taught him how to fish at the age of 12. James said, *"I didn't want to fish but my father told me that when you are a man, you can't depend on one thing, you have to learn many things because you do not know where you will find yourself tomorrow."* He says, *"Fishing means a lot to me. Sending my children to school is because of fishing. Everything that I do, that I live on is fishing. God first, then fishing is my life."*



In 2005, James rowed 200 kilometres from his home in River Cess to start a new life in New Kru Town. He spent five years establishing himself before his family came to join him but despite all his work, life was difficult.

He said, *"Before I joined the CAFOD project I was using my traditional methods in my fishing activities. I was not going too far. If I went further, I would not be able to see the shore and I could lose my way back home. It wasn't through choice that we were fishing around the shore side but based on the equipment that we used, it wouldn't allow us to go to a far distance. So, it was difficult but we had to do it because it was all that we could afford to do."*

"Sometimes I got no catch at all because I was not going far out. That was one of the



reasons why I had to send my children home, out of school. Sometimes there would be no food for that day. I would tell them, bear with daddy, things will get better, and we are going to hold on together." It was very difficult.

An appeal for your help!

Could you help in your parish, inspiring our church to help build a better world or by visiting our local schools?
Or raise a voice and campaign for justice or perhaps speak for CAFOD throughout the area?
Could you support local volunteers? Training and support is provided.
See: <https://cafod.org.uk/volunteer> for more information about how you can help.
Or get in touch with me by email: apowell@cafod.org.uk

James was risking everything to put food on his family's table. Five fishermen a month in James' community were losing their lives at sea, people James called brothers. CAFOD funded on-land and at-sea safety training for fishermen in James' community and provided equipment to help them navigate and stay safe. He told us, "The CAFOD project introduced many things in our village. We were able to get lifejackets, we have a signal mirror and we were able to get the fish finder with the GPS. The CAFOD training made me more brave at sea and I'm not using the traditional methods like before."

When he was in the paddle canoe, he could only go 6 or 7 nautical miles but with the GPS he can now go above 70 nautical miles and using the fish finder he is able to catch more fish because he can travel at sea any time he chooses, even at night.

James says, "I got more food. I feel good because I used to buy rice by the cup but now, I can buy it in 25kg bags. And when I go fishing, I've got my fridge, I've got fresh fish." James used the money he made from catching more fish to buy a bigger boat with an engine. He now hires and trains young fishermen, passing on his knowledge to the next generation. "It is my prayer that I want the project to continue and the fishermen with the GPS will go further and bring more fish and the community will be developed." Your donations this Fast Day will help hardworking people like James to get the tools they need to feed their families. Please give what you can and remember to pray for our work. For whatever you are able to do, thank you!

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PEACE SUNDAY 2024

By Matty Maslen, Newsletter Editor



The 14th January will mark Peace Sunday. Each year, the Pope chooses a theme for the day for us to centre our prayers around.

This year, the theme is 'Artificial Intelligence and Peace'. This is an extremely relevant topic at a time when there are conversations in government about the safety concerns



surrounding artificial intelligence, particularly in relation to warfare.

As you read this, two nuclear-weapon states continue to wage attacks on non-nuclear weapon states. The disparity between the threat of these weapons and conventional ones is clear.

You can find the full text of Francis' statement here: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Pope-Francis-Message-for-World-Day-of-Peace-2024.pdf>

For Peace Sunday Pax Christi have developed a range of resources which you can find here: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday/>

In relation to artificial intelligence, the transparency in what's at stake is lost. In warfare, as its use for peaceful purposes, the potential of artificial intelligence is wide-ranging. From drone use to strategy development using algorithms, the possibilities are open and somewhat frightening.

As Pope Francis reminds us in his message, *"We cannot presume a priori that its development will make a beneficial contribution to the future of humanity and to peace among peoples"*.

Therefore, we are called on to pressure those in power to make sure that the technologies we develop are constrained by regulations, and that people are appointed to ensure that these are adhered to.

In his statement, Pope Francis talks of how, underpinning all technological developments, must be the notion of the *"inherent dignity of each human being and the fraternity that binds us together as members of the one human family"*.

From the outside, the Church is not very widely regarded to be current or up to date with global discourse.

But, in choosing this theme for Peace Sunday, Pope Francis has reminded us, and the world, that the Church can be 'on topic'. Francis' statement is a testament to the ability of the Church to remain part of the conversation.

Further than this, it reminds us of our role as people of faith to continue to engage with the pressing issues of the time.

In fact, much of what Pope Francis says simply builds on the work of his predecessors. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI made clear our responsibility to remain aware and critical of technological developments: *"if technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. Eph 3:16; 2 Cor 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world" (Benedict XVI 2007).*

Artificial intelligence is a contemporary ethical puzzle for us. But the advancing of technology has always been present, and the historical stance of the Church on this issue has been consistent:

Technology can be, and often is, used for:

- the lessening of inequality,
- the achievement of justice,
- the promotion of peace, and
- the protection of the environment.

When it is, we ought to embrace it. It is when it fails to do so, or actively does the opposite, that we must take a stand. And it is our responsibility to ensure that the regulations are in place.

Although Peace Sunday will have passed by the time this issue is released, the resources developed are useful in helping us to see how we can connect our faith and our activism to new ethical qualms like artificial intelligence.



EVENTS

 <p>Weds 7th Feb</p>	<p>Leeds Lent Prayer Diary 2024 Launch <i>Roscoe Methodist Church, 132 Chapeltown Rd, Leeds, LS7 4EE @ 6pm to 9pm</i></p> <p>Pray for the city with a different local organisation highlighted each day in the diary, including prayer requests and reflections to help you on your Lent journey. Our theme this year will be Compassion (Colossians 3:12). This launch event will include talks, stalls, and an opportunity to connect with Christians from all over the city.</p> <p>To register for this FREE event, click: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/leeds-lent-prayer-diary-2024-launch-tickets-780074593107?aff=oddttdcreator</p>
 <p>Sat 17th Feb</p>	<p>Closure Date for Columban Schools Media Competition</p> <p>This year’s competition on the theme of ‘Biodiversity Matters’. Students aged 13-18 are invited to submit an original piece of writing or an original image on the theme. First prize in each category is £500. Follow the link for more details and to enter: https://www.columbancompetition.com/</p>
 <p>Sat 9th Mar</p>	<p>Care for Creation: Commitments, Actions & Participation <i>St Patrick's Catholic Primary School Hardybutts Wigan Lancashire WN1 3RZ @ 10am to 3:30pm</i></p> <p>Input on the latest environmental initiatives across the Archdiocese of Liverpool, and Care for Creation leadership training. It is a joint event between the Archdiocese and Liverpool Justice & Peace. With talks from Bishop John Arnold and Sr. Margaret Atkins.</p> <p>To register, use this link: https://archdioceseofliverpool.churchsuite.com/events/vr8p9ggi</p>
 <p>Thu 14th Mar</p>	<p>2024 Romero Lecture <i>Yorkshire venue and time to be confirmed</i></p> <p>Put the date in your diary now to come and hear Raymond Perrier speak. Raymond is director of the Hurley Institute in South Africa. The title of his talk will be ‘Prayerful and Prophetic Resilience in the Face of Injustice - Archbishops Oscar Romero and Denis Hurley’.</p> <p>We will be creating an Eventbrite webpage soon!</p>
 <p>Fri 19 Jul – Sun 21st Jul</p>	<p>National Justice & Peace Network Annual Conference <i>Swanwick Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire</i></p> <p>Details are still to be announced – but always worth considering as it provides a unique opportunity to meet people from across the country who share your concern for social justice.</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.