



WHERE OLIVE TREES WEEP

By Joe Burns, Commission member

The SPARK-sponsored film in the Leeds Palestinian Film Festival this year (the tenth year) was called 'Where Olive Trees Weep'. The film cleverly cut between talking heads, filmed footage from various encounters by ordinary Palestinians with Israeli military forces and some archive footage. It was at times harrowing to watch.



One of the key messages was that Israel has created an apartheid state where Palestinians must live under different conditions to Israeli citizens (for instance, being subject to military law instead of civil law). It chronicled the gradual loss of land to illegal Israeli settlements and physical abuses by the Israeli military and asked the question why so little of this is reported in mainstream western media.

In academic circles there is an acceptance of the 'generational trauma' of the Jewish people because of the Holocaust. However, the state of Israel is now creating similar generational trauma in the Palestinian people – dehumanising them in so many ways so

that they can be more easily 'dealt' with: they are not treated as equal human beings but as obstacles to Israel taking total control over all of the areas nominally under Palestinian control. The film spent some time exploring how Palestinians (especially children but others as well) can cope with their daily trauma. The resilience of so many of them was extraordinary.



The filming took place during 2022 and, watching it, you could not help but think how much more desperate the situation is now in the year since the 7th October 23 Hamas attack. It was a difficult watch – but no more so than watching documentaries about the Holocaust: something which we should all do, lest we become too insulated from the horrors going on in our world.

LEEDS DIOCESE CATHOLIC EDUCATION NETWORK LAUNCH

by Kathy Shaw, SPARK Project Manager

The new Catholic Education Network was launched in November at Hinsley Hall, led by Deborah Garcia, Head of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at Leeds Trinity University.

This positive and original idea will provide personal and professional support to students interested in working in faith-based education, attracting the best talent to apply for schools within our Diocese.



Lucy, an active SPARK member, spoke at the Launch via a link. She is in her final year of Primary Teacher training and a member of the busy parish of St Theresa and St Winefride in Wibsey. Lucy invited students to participate in Diocesan activities linked to education and social justice. She spoke of how being part of SPARK has opened opportunities such as leadership training with Citizens UK, leading sessions on social justice with her local youth group, primary school and church and representing SPARK at the Caritas Day of Reflection in September. Being part of SPARK has given Lucy the chance to network with organisations in the wider faith-based community and those working for social justice, "I have met people and had chances I wouldn't otherwise have had without SPARK".

SPARK can connect our membership with partner services such as Catholic Care, Leeds Church Institute, Poverty and Truth Network, CAFOD and SVP to name a few. We have strong links with the Universities and at Leeds Trinity we support the Chaplaincy with their events such as Tea on the Landing and have one-off events such as the fun, art-based afternoon in October "Dreaming of Sustainability" led by the creative director of Journey to 2030.



NEW CHAIR FOR SPARK SOCIAL JUSTICE STEERING GROUP

The SPARK social Justice project started 6 years ago – initiated by the Leeds Diocese Justice & Peace Commission. In the first few months the project mainly worked in High schools, including St Mary's in Menston, which is where Tom Allan got involved.

When he left school to attend Sheffield University he was invited to join the SPARK Project Steering Group and he was happy to do so. His involvement has helped to shape how the project has progressed and the approach that the project takes to engaging with people below 30 who still regard themselves as Catholic, although they may not be regular mass attenders.

Having finished university, Tom returned to Leeds last Summer to take up his first job. At the Steering Group meeting on December 4th Tom took over as Chair. The picture shows Tom with the outgoing Chair, Marg Siberry. Marg commented *"I am delighted that Tom agreed to take on the role of Chair. If we want to work with people under 30 then it just makes sense to have someone in that age group as the chair of the group that steers the project. We have a wonderful group of people - with a wide variety of experiences, skills and networks – so Tom will have plenty of support as we continue to take the project forward."*

Tom commented: *"I have been truly inspired by the work coming from SPARK and I'm excited to help lead and deliver this. The work of the project wouldn't be possible without our fantastic project manager, Kathy Shaw, and the rest of the steering group who have enabled this project to overcome*



challenges and celebrate its successes. SPARK is in a place now where we're really starting to see the momentum build, as we encounter more young adults we're able to connect with and we're starting to become more recognisable and reputable throughout the Leeds Diocese for positive work and inspiring results coming from the project. I'm still a little taken aback that I was approached to take on this role, but it's something I take great pride in doing. SPARK, and the Justice and Peace Commission as a whole, have been massively supportive of myself and other young adults and I couldn't be more thankful for this opportunity. I'd also like to say a massive thank you to Marg for her leadership on the project, I'm lucky that despite stepping back from chairing, she will continue to work with us on the project's steering group as she is a valuable asset to our team. "

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JUST STOP OIL ACTION

By Mollie Somerville, Bradford

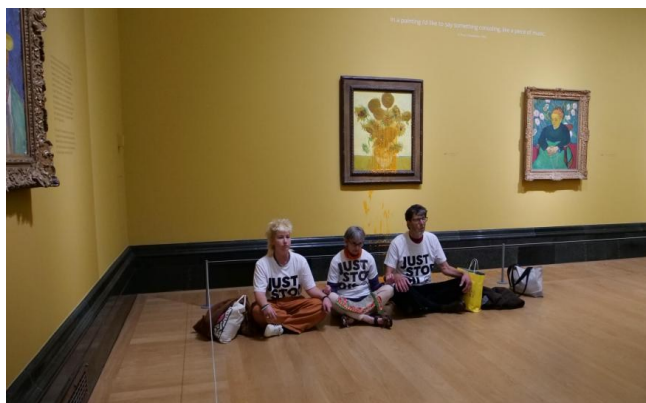
For many years, since the late 1960s, when I spent 2 years in Ethiopia, I was concerned about the inequality between the rich and poor worlds. I have been a supporter of CAFOD and Christian Aid ever since and a member of Global Justice Now (previously known as World Development Movement). I was an active member of the Leeds and Bradford Justice and Peace Commission and took the "Option for the Poor" to heart. Since then, I've lobbied Parliament, been on marches and demonstrations, written letters and emails and changed my lifestyle especially since reading and reflecting on "Laudato Si". As Global Warming became the Climate crisis and then Climate breakdown I realised that government leaders and powerful multinational companies, particularly the fossil fuel industry, were ignoring the science and not listening to the thousands of people telling them of the existential crisis.

I saw it as my Christian duty to take more radical action as I had the time, health and opportunity to do so. I was angry at the deafness of the people in power, fearful for the future of people, particularly in the global south, and sad for my children and grandchildren who will have to live through devastating changes to the planet.

Since the first action I've been involved in two "Slow Marches" in London and also a "Lock on" at Gatwick airport in July 2024. Court cases are ongoing for most of these.



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The purpose is to get as much publicity as possible so people in power feel the pressure and begin to take climate breakdown seriously. Thousands of people at a demo get little coverage; 7 people sitting in an airport departure lounge get TV and media time and the issues discussed.

Soon after the Gatwick incident I was asked if I was willing to do a cultural action. It turned out to be throwing soup at two paintings by Van Gogh in the National Gallery. It was regarded as “high risk”, that is, likely to end in a custodial sentence of perhaps 2 years. After prayer, discussion and meditation I agreed. The action was designed to imitate action taken 2 years previously by two young activists who were due for sentencing. Three of us targeted 2 paintings within an hour of their sentence being announced. We demanded an international Non-proliferation Treaty on fossil fuels.

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juststopoil.org

There were gasps of shock from the crowd in the gallery as they realised what was happening. They were ushered out as we made short speeches explaining why we

were there. The incident was filmed from the start and stewards/security people quickly ushered the spectators away. 16 Police came to arrest us as we sat quietly on the floor and within 15 or 20 minutes the pictures (paintings undamaged) were taken off the wall and put on trolleys. Arrests were made, two nights in police cells followed with a session at a Magistrates court to set a trial date at Crown Court in January 2026.

As for previous actions the publicity was far reaching. Will it change anything? We can only hope and pray.

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WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF LAUDATO SI?

By Joe Burns Commission member and Mark Wiggin (NDEG)

This was the theme of the NDEG (Northern Dioceses Environment Group) zoom meeting on 27 November. This is in the context of preparing, in June 2025, to celebrate 10 years since its publication.

The speakers were **John Woodhouse** (Laudato Si Animators Co-ordinator) and **Dr Emma Gardner** (Director of the *Laudato Si Centre*, Diocese of Salford).

There was an opportunity for participants to share their experiences of the impact of *Laudato Si* in their community, parish and diocese. A fruitful discussion followed that led into sharing resources and news.

John Woodhouse has been the national coordinator of the Laudato Si Movement in England & Wales for the last 3 years and there are about 150 animators on their database. There has been active participation in many national initiatives e.g. Restore Nature Now that attracted over 60,000



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people from many different organisations. Facebook, articles in Independent Catholic News etc plus 2 zoom meetings a year keep animators engaged. 'The Letter' (the beautiful film about *Laudato Si*), which was shown during Lent, attracted 400 participants online.



[The Laudato Si Movement](#) is an international movement and the UK animators are held in high regard globally as active in this field. It really helps to be part of a global network when we are dealing with global problems. Joining networks and supporting others and their initiatives that are in line with LS is an adopted strategy. 24 of the animators met earlier in the year at the *Laudato Si* Centre, Wardley Hall.

Some of the other key points that John made were:

- Clergy need training in social action and *Laudato Si* issues as parishes still have much to do
- by contrast 'schools and children are way ahead of us! – we don't hear their voices enough.'
- 'We need to convert our clergy.'

The Laudato Si Movement animators are planning a possible pilgrimage to Assisi in June 2025. The secretary of the Bishops' conference has said that he will ask the chair if the bishops can make a visit to Wardley Hall during their Leeds meeting in Nov 25.

Let's hope that does happen as experiencing the centre is important! Animators are working on an encounter overnight staying near Wardley Hall probably in Sept. It's possible there may be room for some environmental leads - the number is limited to 30. For more information contact johnwoodhousecat@gmail.com

Dr Emma Gardner, Head of Environment for the Diocese of Salford, presented the progress over the years since the publication of *Laudato Si*

A major development was the appointment of Bishop John Arnold with responsibility for the Environment for the Bishops Conference of England and Wales and the creation of the Laudato Si Centre, at Wardley Hall, Salford. The centre is for all faiths and none - in



keeping with Pope Francis in his encyclical that is addressed to 'all people of good will'. The emphasis at the centre is on a practical approach to caring for creation and attracts schools, parishes, universities and

religious groups.

The journey has been highlighted by many special events:

- 2015 *Laudato Si* encyclical published
- 2017 An advisory group formed from universities, CAFOD, MP's and environment specialists
- 2019 [The Laudato Si centre](#) opens
- 2020 [Guardians of Creation](#) established via the Catholic Bishops Conference
- [Boarbank Hall](#) starts its *Laudato Si* retreats



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- 2022 [Small Things](#) published – Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
- The film based on *Laudato Si* - '[The Letter](#)' released
- 2024 *Laudato Si* awards for schools started

Alongside all this has been :

- [The Journey to 2030](#), developed in the Arundel & Brighton Diocese
- dioceses disinvesting from fossil fuels,
- The setting up of [The Laudato Si Institute at Campion Hall](#) through the Jesuits,
- the visit to Pope Francis etc.



Emma's presentation set up a good discussion that included 'Why is the LS Centre, Salford Diocese the only LS centre in the country?' This prompted some good replies:

- The site in Lancaster Diocese at Ladyewell (nr. Preston) is a Marian Shrine and would make an excellent *Laudato Si* centre for Lancaster Diocese
- Hexham and Newcastle Diocese are buying land at the Emmaus Village site at Annitsford and will be planting trees there, encouraged by Bishop Stephen.

There was a question about charging to visit The *Laudato Si* centre, especially in relation to schools. The Wardley Hall centre does make a charge for groups visiting for half or a

full day to cover staff costs and ensure the project itself is sustainable. For groups that cannot afford this, there is an outreach programme where staff visit schools etc. In relation to this a question was put out about dioceses investing in paid posts to promote social justice and to address the care of our common home. *Are we making a business case to diocesan authorities?*

Finally, the question was put: "Are we doing enough?" (The answer was a qualified 'no' - we are not doing enough but each of us can only do so much)

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RED CARPET IN GAZA

By Joe Burns, Commission member

The Commission part-sponsored this Leeds Palestinian Film Festival event at Wheeler Hall on 30 November. Rather than an individual film, this event showed several short films. The connecting thread for them was that in the previous 12 months, despite immense difficulties, there have been two film festivals held within Gaza itself. This event showcased a couple of these films along with a short documentary about how they went about putting on a film festival in the rubble of Gaza.



The event provided a window into life in Gaza in 2024 – where media outlets are not allowed to go. The devastation is shocking. In



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one of the films there was a buzzing sound for a significant portion of it – which was revealed to be the sound of Israeli reconnaissance drones flying overhead 24 hours a day. However, this was an incidental aspect of the films. The strongest message coming through to me was one of the hope and resilience of humans in the face of the most difficult of circumstances. The usual location used for showing films has been destroyed. The projector for showing films had been destroyed. The short documentary showed two of the organisers going to a stall to recharge their phones and a laptop as there is no regular power supply. There were discussions about having to show the films during the day, as there were too many bombing raids by the Israeli Defence Forces at nighttime.

In the end, they recovered a large TV on a trolley and showed the films among the rubble with people standing round or sitting wherever they could.

The festival organisers remarked at one point about how the responses they had received from many different countries had buoyed them to continue with the organisation of the festival. Perhaps they didn't realise the impact their work would have on others in the West. If they can continue to try and provide some level of 'normality' and continuity in the appalling circumstances in which they have to survive then the least that we can do is to continue to show solidarity in whatever way we can.

NEXT YEAR IS A JUBILEE YEAR

By Angela Powell, CAFOD Hallam & Leeds

2025 is a Year of Jubilee! Traditionally, a time of renewal, freedom and celebration: Debts were cancelled, people and the land could

rest, prisoners and slaves freed, and land redistributed fairly, a year of the Lord's favour. In Luke, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Jesus makes clear his mission, to bring the justice and freedom of the Jubilee, and we are called to share in it. This is at the heart of all CAFOD does.

Join CAFOD as Pilgrims of Hope

1. **Join an Introduction to the Jubilee Year** 18 Jan, 10:30am-12pm online. With Fr Jan Nowotnik, from the Catholic Bishop's Conference, Christine Allen and Kayode Akintola from CAFOD with music from Ooberfuse. Register now for free cafod.org.uk/jubilee
2. **Use CAFOD's [reflection guide](#)** to explore the biblical meaning of Jubilee, and discover God's call for you.
3. Currently we face the most **acute global debt crisis** in history. Pope Francis calls for action, saying it is a "matter of justice." Sign the global petition cafod.org.uk/campaign
4. **Give a regular gift and help** those living in poverty across the world. Help CAFOD's partners to reach wherever the need is greatest. cafod.org.uk/give
5. **Lend a hand** to help your parish/school get more involved and bring communities together to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God. cafod.org.uk/volunteer






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6. **Celebrate the Jubilee in Schools.** Join 'Jubilee for Schools' Launch on 24 January 2025 get resources for children and young people at: jubilee-schools.org.uk



Pictured is a Jubilee Icon commissioned by CAFOD depicting Luke 4:16-21. Created by Mulugeta Araya, an artist and engineer who studied at St Mary's college in Ethiopia. St Mary's offers vocational training for young people in agriculture, IT and accounting, as well as the arts. The college also takes part in programmes to improve food security, the supply of water and emergency response in the area.

EVENTS

 Sat 18 Jan	Yorkshire CND AGM <i>Brian Jackson House, 2 New North Parade Huddersfield, HD1 5JP 1pm – 4pm</i> Non-members are welcome to come and hear their main speaker: Steve Barwick who has had a lifetime in politics with a strong interest in nuclear disarmament See our website for more details
 Sun 19 Jan	Peace Sunday 2025 <i>Everywhere in the UK!</i> Will this special day be marked in your church community? Get some ideas by using this link: https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2025/
 Fri 25th – Sun 27 Jul	National Justice & Peace Network Annual Conference: Just Peace <i>The Christian Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire</i> A weekend exploring peace with keynote speakers (including Dr Rowan-Williams) and workshops covering a range of aspects of Just Peace. If you are 30 or under then SPARK Social Justice has a limited number of sponsored places. More details to follow.

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.