



Nonviolence Workshop a sellout!

By Carol Burns, Leeds Diocese Pax Christi

Most of the time we do not realise that we live in a 'culture of war', as most people's lives are not violent. However, conflict is human and there will always be conflict. This workshop was not about aiming to remove conflict in our relationships with others but to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.

This was the beginning of Nicolas Paz's workshop on practical tools to resolve conflict. Nicolas Paz is the Director of CNI (The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative), which was started a few years ago by Pax Christi International. As well as doing that he is also a lecturer in philosophy and mediation at the University of Salamanca in Spain.



Our pax Christi group had joined with Quakers in Leeds in the hope of attracting 25 people to this event. We extended the numbers to 30 (which was the maximum we thought would work for a workshop like this) and it still sold out. Just as pleasingly, the people who came were from a wide range of ages, and Christian traditions. We gathered to explore these issues at the Quaker Meeting House on Woodhouse Lane in Leeds on Sunday 16th March.

Nicolas led us in a relaxed and humorous way through some principles of nonviolence using

his background in mediation with families, in schools, with the police and even the Spanish army.

This workshop is an experiment he said I am not sure where it will go. The task orientated part of me felt very nervous, but his skill, expertise and charm took me along with the flow.

He used the process of the workshop to illustrate his points - including the first decision of the group to decide when the coffee/tea break would be. This demonstrated how an initial idea might then be developed as group members added more information, gave alternative suggestions and voiced their individual needs. That decision could have taken the whole workshop, but thankfully Nicolas used the authority we had given him to make the decision more quickly!

That illustrated another of his themes, who has authority and who has it recognising that power imbalances will have an impact on dealing with conflict. The aim in any conflict resolution is for a win/win situation not lose/lose or win/lose. This shouldn't be competitive and, at the end everyone should feel they have achieved what they need.



Some key messages for me were that resolving conflict is not about the facts but about perception and once we understand that we can move forward. He illustrated this



in a concrete way by asking us to move from our seats and sit in a different place. How different does that feel? Elements of a nonviolent approach to conflict as well as perception include narrative, space and time.

Nicolas' focused on the importance of space. Stressed that this needs to be a very concrete thing. The place where we meet, how do we use physical space in a meeting area, how to engineer informal spaces. When we are analysing the context of a conflict ask ourselves where and when does it happen. Another key message was that dialogue comes towards the end of the process: all the other aspects need to be in place first. In other words, we need to prepare for managing conflict.

One of the most moving aspects of the workshop was when we were asked to introduce ourselves and express what our issues concerning conflict were. Participants were experiencing a wide range of conflicts some very personal and hopefully Nicolas was able to offer something to everyone.

This session was an excellent introduction to practical tools and we are now thinking of ways we can follow it up. We will be producing a brief resources leaflet for participants and this will be held on the Justice and Peace website

Find out more about the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative by using this link:

<https://paxchristi.net/catholic-institute-for-nonviolence/>

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JUST TALK: THE 2026 NJPN CONFERENCE



'Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other has something good to say', Pope Francis.

Booking for the National Justice & Peace Network's (NJPN's) 48th Annual Conference, JUST TALK, taking place at The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire between the 24th and the 26th July, is now open

In a world of disinformation, sound bites and echo chambers, the conference will explore how we promote genuine communication and encounter through areas such as the media, arts, education, diplomacy and political engagement led always by the Spirit of Truth.

NJPN comment that "Our aims - to increase participants understanding of how language and other forms of communication are used or misused in our current context - and - to help participants challenge disinformation and divisive rhetoric, change narratives,

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A PASCHALTIDE RELECTION FOR 2026.

by John Battle, Commission Chair



The bright Easter window poster from the Jesuit Refugee Service "REFUGEES WELCOME" quotes Pope Francis; "The Easter message of the Risen Christ invites us not to forget those women and men seeking a better future". It is an open hearted, inclusive message, running counter to public discourse in the UK in recent weeks in which an aggressive assertion of the need to assert "Britain's Christian heritage" has taken a distinctively negative turn. The Conservative shadow justice secretary recently criticised an act of public worship at an event in Trafalgar Square to Mark the end of Ramadan as "an act of domination and therefore division". GB News recently interviewing the Hungarian president on the state of Western culture seemed to endorse his remark that "Muslims have their own place and this place is definitely not Hungary", implying 'and not Britain'! Reform's Home affairs spokesman Zia Yusuf, himself a Muslim, has announced that

Reform will end "the incendiary practice" of unwanted churches being turned into mosques.

A recent Financial Times feature heading, "Is British Politics getting religion?", drew detailed attention to the American religious right's well-funded influence on religious politics here. It spelt out that American thinktanks added support to characters such as Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson (supported by Elon Musk) who claims he converted to Christianity while in prison and who fronted "Unite the Kingdom" Christmas Carol concert.

Robert Lowe MP, expelled from Reform for his extreme attitude to those British citizens of Pakistani heritage now claims that his new "Restore Britain" party will be a Christian based party.

Reform MP Sarah Pochin launching "Christian Fellowship for Reform" announced that "*Reform will always stand up for Christianity in this country... we are fundamentally a Christian country and we are proud to be Christians*".

At the Whitehall Christmas Carol service, a Baptist minister was shouted down when she announced that Christ wasn't English and that "Christ was a refugee at Christmas".

Commenting on the Whitehall event, the Bishop of Kirkstall, Arun Arora, warned "*we are now in a place where in the next 3 to 5 years there will be a battle for those who want to pursue a kind of UK MaGA agenda as to what Christianity is*". Notably, the Maga supporters in the United States, such as Nick Fuentes and Tucker Carson no longer refer to "Judeo-Christian values". Rather they promote an aggressive Christian nationalism increasingly hostile to both Muslims and Jews. President Trump's MAGA "spending bulldog" Russell Vought has blogged that



Muslims were "condemned" because they don't accept Jesus Christ as God, and since then the list of the condemned seems to keep growing. New Reform MP Robert Jenrick dispenses with Christian heritage references, emphasising that *"by 2030 almost a quarter of the population will have been born outside the UK. That's an astonishing statistic. There aren't many successful countries in the world like that"*. Vice President JD Vance has remarked that *"under Labour the UK could become the first Islamic nation with a nuclear weapon"*, (apparently unaware of the existence of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, a nuclear power!)

But if the political implications are becoming clearer, where does it leave understanding and practice of the UK Christian heritage? I remember a public meeting in Leeds to consider a mosque application for a Minaret to echo out the daily call for prayer. The meeting opened with a gentleman immediately demanding that as this is a Christian country as an MP. I should simply declare that there should be "Muzzi muzzen" allowed here. To call the situation and try to have a respectful conversation I invited a young Muslim to explain the word "muezzin" and what the call to prayer meant to him. He carefully passionately and succinctly told us why he prayed to God three times a day. I thanked him for a great sermon on prayer. The "Christian country" gentleman shouted out *"just because I live in a Christian country doesn't mean I have to be into God and prayer and all that rubbish,"* shocking the Muslims present.

So where does that leave our understanding of what it means to be a Christian here in our society? It can't be sufficient, as the new Christian right simply assert, that it was King Alfred the great who included the 10

Commandments as a preface to his legal code back in the ninth century. Moreover, the 10 Commandments are only half of the story to be complemented by the Beatitudes spelt out by Jesus in the Gospels. As the Democrat challenger for the Senate in Texas recently spelt out *"my concern is the members of Congress who are quoting scripture and then violating the teachings of Jesus every day- who are not feeding the hungry, not healing the Sick, not welcoming the stranger."* Notably at the funeral of the Christian right Campaigner Charlie Kirk President Trump said *"Kirk didn't hate his opponents. He wanted the best for them. That's where I disagree with Charlie. I hate my opponents and I don't want the best for them."* in his 1997 book, *The Art of the Comeback* he set out his ethics *"Get even. During the bad times I learned who was loyal and who wasn't. I believe in an eye for an eye. A couple of people who betrayed me need my help now and I am screwing them against the wall. I am doing a number.... and I'm having so much fun"*. In the recent warmongering, President Trump, and his secretaries have regularly "othered" and dehumanised people, whipping up hatred, revenge and violence both at home and abroad.

Closer to home, Danny Kruger MP, who defected to Reform, tried to generate a Politics of a new Christian political Centre without resorting to the divisive statements such as those of billionaire Jim Radcliffe (Britain is being "colonised") and Matthew Goodwin's challenges to ethnic minorities as dis-entitled citizens. Kruger get some support from James Orr an evangelical professor of the philosophy of religion at Cambridge recently appointed as the policy advisor to the Reform Party. JD Vance describes him as his. "British sherpa"! He chairs the advisory board of the "Centre for a Better Britain" and



is a member of the advisory council of the "Free speech Union". He has described asylum seekers as "invaders". But his present interest is in developing a *"vision animated by the Politics of home"*, emphasising that *"human beings are not fungible economic units but rooted beings who love particular places particular people and particular ways of life"*.

In an uncertain and turbulent world of ruthlessness and precarity this approach can resonate. The difficulty is that his reference to "particular place" can build in an attitude of exclusion. In other words, "particular homes" are not for everyone. This is reminiscent of JD Vance's interpretation of Saint Augustine's theology of Love in which he claims that in Augustine's "Ordo Amoris" Family neighbour and community come before the rest of the world. Vance argued that immigration crackdowns are compatible with Christian love. Love is measured out through concentric circles always putting in one's own family and immediate community ahead of service to the stranger Pope Leo has responded *"JD Vance is wrong. Jesus doesn't ask us to rank our love for others. He spelt out that true Christian love is not a 'rationed' ranking system but one that demands care for all"* and he criticises the abuse of Catholic theology to justify restrictive Draconian migration policies.

But Professor Orr has pushed Vance's position even further, claiming that the nation is *"the outermost concentric circle of concrete affection"* adding *"if you think that the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan is that Samaria should welcome and care for all Judeans dispossessed, think again"*. But as the theologian Luke Bretherton stresses, the urgent needs of strangers can supersede those of our close circles. Significantly both Pope Benedict XVI

and Pope Francis included major chapters explicating in detail the parable of the good Samaritan in their social justice encyclicals. In *Fratelli Tutti* (para 80) Pope Francis writes: *"Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan in answer to the question 'who is my neighbour?'. The word 'neighbour' in the society of Jesus's time usually meant those nearest us. It was felt that help should be given primarily to those of one's own group and race.... Jesus completely transforms this approach he asks us not to decide who is close enough to be our neighbour but rather that we ourselves big come neighbours to all. Jesus asked us to be present to those in need of help regardless of whether or not they belong to our social group."*

Notably, the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales published "love this stranger" which spells out this message.

As we enter the Paschaltide mystery of the passion, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus at Easter, it is perhaps worth commenting on the misrepresentation of the flags bearing St George's Cross, which have appeared on lamp posts throughout the land. They are now associated with abusive and violent demonisation of migrants - regardless of the fact that many migrants are themselves Christians. The Cross is the traditional symbol of an instrument of a slow and agonising death for those not protected by Roman citizenship. It became a scandalous declaration that no human life was beyond the love of God as Rowan Williams spelt out in his feature in the new statesman in December 2025. He writes

"it was a declaration that human community was shockingly larger than what any state or culture could define and that to belong in the realm of God people would have to recognise that they stood on the same level as all



kinds of unwelcome strangers and let go of their pride in belonging to any kind of privileged powerful or innocent Group And when early Christian matters declared Christ is King when faced with torture and execution what they were saying is not that they were part of a movement aimed at universal control of society but quite the opposite. They were declaring that no earthly political system could make absolute demands on it's citizens. Ultimately, we are answerable not to some kind of sacred National or imperial authority but to the vision of a reconcile community of people who have met the possibility of love and homecoming at the point of their deepest loss and failure. In other words, the symbolism of the Cross was something that in principle spoke to all kinds of dispossessed and insecure people and promised a life giving absolving hopeful kind of human association"

Fr. Albert Nolan OP, in his book 'Jesus the Liberator', points out that we don't really take the Sermon on the Mount seriously; "we don't give away our coats; we don't go the extra mile; we don't forgive 70x7; and we certainly do not put all our hope and trust in God". We all have a little list of who we wouldn't want to live next door. St Benedict, in his rule, says:

First of all, love the Lord God with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your strength, then love your neighbour as yourself. Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not covet.

Do not bear false witness. Respect all people. And never do to another what you would not want done to yourself.

He goes onto insist; "*give help and support to the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and bury the dead, console and counsel those who suffer in time of grief and bring comfort to those whose sorrow*". St Matthew's Gospel is strong on making connections with the Old Testament books of the Jewish tradition and his account of the sermon on the Mount contains echoes from the short book of Lamentations written after the 587 Fall of Jerusalem ("don't give with one hand and take with another"). The most familiar section of Lamentations is used in the Good Friday liturgy to recall the physical dismantling of Christ on Calvary. But it begins by describing the mourning of the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants and the breakdown of community. But out of this darkness shines array of unconquerable trust in God and of wholehearted repentance.

In the words of Robert Davison's comment "The Courage to Doubt"

"The darkness of disaster, though deserved, cannot be God's final word to the community. They remain his servants, his people who may confidently expect to experience in the future as they have done in the past, is steadfast love and his dependability. Despite the grief, they experience, God's compassion never fails; it is new every morning "

Brooding on my anguish and affliction Is gall and wormwood My spirit ponders it continually and sinks within me This is what I shall tell my heart And so recover hope The favours of the Lord are not all past His kindnesses are not exhausted Every morning they are renewed. Great is his faithfulness My portion is Yahweh says my soul And so I will hope in him" *Lamentations 3:19*



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foster dialogue and encounter and speak truth to power."

In celebrating 60 years of Nostra Aetate Pope Leo XIV said the document "opened our eyes to a simple yet profound principle: dialogue is not a tactic or a tool, but it's a way of life – a journey of the heart that transforms everyone involved, the one who listens and the one who speaks." In this current climate the need for us all to be able to communicate is more important than ever.

This is not a cheap weekend, but it is an excellent opportunity to meet with Catholics and other Christians from across the country who are passionate about issues of Social Justice. Booking is via this link:

<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/>



SPARK Bursaries Available

Our SPARK programme is offering people aged 18-30 contributions towards the costs of attending the NJPN Conference. The amount will depend on how many applications we get but will be at least half of the cost.

Applications must be submitted by 30 April.

Email info@sparksocialjustice.org.uk to express an interest.

LIVE SIMPLY – SOLAR PANELS

by Keith Pitcher, St John Fisher & St Thomas More, Burley in Wharfedale

Our parish began the CAFOD LiveSimply award in 2019 trying to follow the Gospel call to live simply, in solidarity with people in poverty, and sustainably with creation. It sounds daunting but forming a parish team was a great way to get things going. We asked parishioners for ideas that were important to them and could be put into action. We had over 300 suggestions, and gained our LiveSimply award in 2022, a great occasion for our parish; a result of making a lot of these suggestions happen.



More recently parishioners suggested installing solar panels on the south facing roof at church. They had installed panels on their houses and found they had worked well with good paybacks. This seemed timely as the parish had already replaced old, inefficient gas heaters with electric heaters, thermostats & time controls, implemented a schedule to replace single glazed windows with double glazing, changed old lighting with LEDs and planned to replace the lighting in the main part of the church.

When getting quotations, the design was based on historic electricity usage but also



looked forward to future changes needed to supply low energy heating. The system we chose was for 22 panels, each 500Wp, generating 8,750kWh per annum, saving 1.6 tonnes of CO₂, plus an 11.5kWh battery to store generated electricity.

An ethical, environmental and economic report gave a project payback of 6 years, to be financed by our parish. It was supported by our parish, our finance committee and then by the diocesan finance committee. The installation took only a few days during December 2024. The main electricity meter was later exchanged by the diocese's energy supplier for free smart meters, enabling the parish to receive income for electricity exported to the local grid through the UK's Smart Export Guarantee scheme. And removing the meter previously supplying the presbytery means one set of standing charges are no longer being paid.



We monitor the system via an App. We've been impressed with its performance. The panels generate electricity not only in direct sunlight but also on cloudy days as well. During 2025 the panels generated 10,550 kWh, outperforming their design, this due to an exceptionally sunny spring & early summer. The panels supply both the church

and presbytery. Making some of our own electricity has significantly cut our monthly bills and we earn money from the surplus. And all the saved carbon is great for the environment.

As Bishop Marcus said in his September 2024 Pastoral Letter for the Season of Creation: "We may lack the power to change the whole world, but we do have the ability ... to make changes in our own lives, homes and communities."

Reducing energy usage and costs are a priority for our diocese.

The Diocesan Laudato Si' Sustainability Group has produced a leaflet to help parishes, schools and individual homes who would like detailed steps for installing solar panels. The diocese has a partnership with the company used to install solar panels at our church.

All details are available from carla.stockton-jones@dioceseofleeds.org.uk. Charities, including churches, benefit from 0%VAT on PV and batteries until 31st March 2027.

We've discussed how the panels work in our parish children's liturgy. Parents told us that The Environment is part of the school curriculum, they said our project provides a great example of putting this into practice.

Looking back, it's been a good project. We hope it will encourage others to consider this for their own parishes and homes.

Do contact us if you would like to discuss anything in more detail or visit our parish, our email is office.sfishermore@dioceseofleeds.org.uk

No Room for events this month! – but they are the accompanying email.