

# Justice & Peace Matters

## National Justice & Peace Network Conference

Gill and Tom Caple took part in the First NJPN Conference after COVID held on July 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick. Over 160 attended from J&P Groups around the UK, religious and secular organisations representing peace and justice interests and projects. Most were Catholics, and others the CofE, the Methodist, Baptist and other churches, secular institutions and individuals.

### HOPE IS A VERB WITH ITS SLEEVES ROLLED UP

The theme of the conference put the focus on action to realise Pope Paul VI's statement that

#### *IF YOU WANT PEACE, WORK FOR JUSTICE*

with talks, discussions and workshops aimed at hearing about, understanding and doing things that increase Faith and Hope in the creation of God's Kingdom through supporting and enabling the poor and disadvantaged of the world. This covered dealing with abject poverty, the plight and rehabilitation of prisoners, protecting the environment, cessation of wars and peaceful engagement between antagonists, to the impact on the vulnerable of weak or failing state interventions

Talks, discussion, workshops and films provided the variety of means of involving everyone and bringing home messages of Hope in the impossibility of failure to achieve Christ's mission.

## FROM HIGH DIPLOMACY TO FIRESIDE CHATS IN THE BUSH

Irish diplomat **Philip McDonagh** explored the meaning of hope, drawing on Pope Benedict's encyclical *Spe Salvi*, especially the statement that "all serious and upright conduct is hope in action." He felt "we should 'image' or visualise peace as the rightful possession of the human community as a whole," despite current global conflicts.

"Through developing a culture of dialogue or encounter in national, regional, and global politics we can transform our understanding of effective action and create the conditions for a different kind of civilisation.

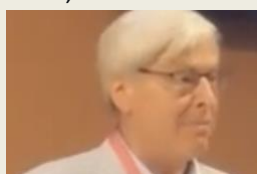
"The [NJPN] is living proof that individual interventions in the name of justice and mercy reinforce one another and can support wider social objectives as well." He pointed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as already providing a common plan for humanity and called for consultative processes to include representatives of religion to underpin their implementation. "In this moment of fractured politics and dissolving ethics, renewed attention to religion as a source of unity is a bold and much-needed initiative," he suggested.

**Rev Dr Patrick Devine SMA** spoke of his peacebuilding work in East Africa as chairman of the Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation.

Shalom seeks to identify, understand and address the underlying causes of conflict rather than just address the symptoms.

Fr Devine spoke of dramatic, life-changing results in the areas of conflict transformation, peace education and poverty alleviation.

Shalom researches root causes of inter-ethnic conflicts, trains local peace-builders, organises workshops to facilitate resolution and reconciliation processes between factions, and develops inter-ethnic and inter-religious schools. "Theory without practice is empty and practice without theory is blind," he said.



**Philip Mc Donagh**



**Fr Dr Patrick Devine SMA**

Text drawn from NJPN press release 25 July 2022.

All talks from NJPN Conference 2022, 'Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up' at:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4HAuivOZMEVt5GE-gSBfoVQbZ4PtE\\_ov](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4HAuivOZMEVt5GE-gSBfoVQbZ4PtE_ov)

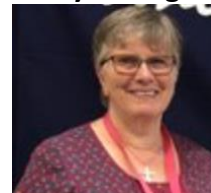
## GETTING BEYOND OPTIMISM TO HOPE

### Demonstrating or building the Kingdom in the world of politics

This was the energetic, amusing and very serious presentation by **Andy Flanagan** of Christians in Politics and a singer-songwriter. He spoke of leading parliamentarians in singing about integrity, truth and justice at a parliamentary prayer breakfast in early July and a spate of government ministerial resignations which took place hours later! Christians believe that, "integrity in leadership is really important." A firm believer in tackling the causes of injustice, he praised NJPN for its campaigning work over the years to promote justice and compassion. His music also provided the Saturday evening entertainment.



**Andy Flanagan**



**Rev Ruth Gee**

### WORKSHOPS

Workshops included issues of domestic poverty and universal credit, Salford's 'Guardians of Creation' project, restoring dignity to prisoners and their families, Church Action for Tax Justice and Interfaith work on Justice and Peace.

A preview of the film, 'Finite: The Science of Climate Change', which looks at non-violent direct action in Germany and UK to protect ancient forests from coal mines, attracted an audience of 60.

### LITURGIES

Liturgies were organised by the Lay Community of St Benedict and both Catholic and ecumenical worship was offered. Conference planning partners included ACTA, Christians Aware, Joint Public Issues Team, and Stella Maris. **Rev Ruth Gee**, a Methodist pastor and patron of NJPN who led a service on Saturday afternoon, spoke of, "being united by concern and passion for justice and peace and by a shared faith."

### A JUST FAIR

A Just Fair hosted 25 stalls, including Together for the Common Good, Green Christian, Christian Climate Action, Columbans, Missio, World Council for Christian Meditation, Fairtrade, Palestinian Goods and Global Justice Now. Food at the conference was guided by LOAF principles (Local, Organic, Animal Friendly, Fairly Traded). Participants left with plenty of ideas and inspiration.

'Let us build the city of God' by Dan Shutte was the final hymn of the 2022 annual conference. It summed up a morning highlighting the work of NJPN members to build a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. And some of the 160 participants at NJPN's 44<sup>th</sup> conference in Derbyshire were dancing to the hymn at a gathering which took the theme, 'Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.'

*If you want to know more about the local Justice and Peace Group contact Tom Caple at [facaple@gmail.com](mailto:facaple@gmail.com)*