

Report on the AGM of the Justice and Peace Co-ordinating Council

Around 30 people attended the AGM of the Justice and Peace Co-ordinating Council by Zoom on Saturday 24 October 2020. The meeting started with a short liturgy prepared by Fr. Adrian, followed by the reading of a message from Bishop Robert Byrne CO in which he gave encouragement to us all for the witness that we give to justice and peace issues in the diocese.

There then followed a short business meeting when Phil Watson was elected as chair, Elizabeth Bennett as vice chair, Marjory Knowles as treasurer (her second term) and Liz Archibald as communications secretary.

The outgoing chair, Veronica Whitty gave her report, followed by the end of year financial report delivered by Marjory Knowles and a report on the Justice and Peace Refugee Project given by Liz Archibald, chair of the Justice and Peace Refugee Project steering group. Their reports are here:

[Chairs Report 2020](#)

[J & P Refugee Project report for AGM 2020](#)

[Year End Accounts 2019 - 2020](#)

We then welcomed James Buchanan from Operation Noah who spoke about "*Responding to the Climate and Environmental Crisis*"

James Buchanan, Operation Noah

James works with churches that are embarking on the process of divestment from fossil fuels. He outlined the devastating effect the climate crisis is already having on communities in the global south such as Bangladesh.

So far the Catholic Dioceses of Arundel and Brighton, Lancaster and Middlesbrough have divested from fossil fuels. He said divestment send out a positive message at a time when many voices are calling for a just and green recovery. He called on us to invest proactively, to look towards investing in companies that promote the common good.

Often it is said that it is better to stay investing in a company that so that you can have a say in the company policy. However, James said that in reality there is little benefit in doing this as the oil and gas industry far from accepting the terms of the Paris agreement are actually planning on exacting MORE than \$5tr in extracting oil and gas.

More information about the Bright Now campaign and Operation Noah can be found at <https://brightnow.org.uk/> and <https://operationnoah.org/>.

We then looked at local Diocesan developments.

Caritas

Fr. Adrian Tuckwell Episcopal Vicar for Caritas explained how Caritas was actually founded in 1951. It was set up by the Vatican to support organisations working to implement Catholic Social Teaching. Since Caritas has been welcomed into the Diocese in January 2020 it has become the umbrella organisation for diocesan groups involved in social outreach. Caritas in our diocese will support existing projects whilst encouraging new ones to reach out to the marginalised in our area.

Tyne and Wear Citizens

For nearly five years the diocese has been a founding and strategic partner of Tyne and Wear Citizens (TWC). TWC works on a model of community organising based on a cycle of Listening/Action/Evaluation.

There have been successes this year. Sunderland became the first local authority in the area to become a Living Wage Employer. St. Cuthbert's Care became the first employer of carers for adult social care to become a Living Wage Employer.

The Hate Crime Action Team has been seeking to make misogyny a hate crime. After much lobbying the new domestic violence bill will see this as a hate crime and a major motivation behind domestic violence.

The 'Just Change' Action Team has had more schools promise to ensure that all children in their school will receive all the money entitled to them.

The Just Change campaign was a catalyst in the campaign to get the government to provide vouchers for children on free school meals during holiday time. Under the leadership of the head teacher Mr David Watson, St. Thomas More Academy in North Shields were at the forefront of this campaign with David Watson appeared before a parliamentary select committee arguing for vouchers for FSM children. It was this campaign that Marcus Rashford became aware of and has been so supportive of. The Just Change team have played an important role in establishing and promoting this campaign, which is still sadly needed and receiving opposition from the government. The Listening Campaign began in December 2019. This work has still carried on since lockdown but through online chats and zoom meetings.

On Wednesday 25 November at 6.30pm - 8.30pm there will be a Delegates Assembly where the five action teams will present their issues and their concrete proposals for action bring about change.

These five action teams are:

- The impact of austerity and poverty
- Fair Work and Low Wages
- The Environment and Climate Change
- Racism
- Mental Health

On Wednesday 25 November from 6.30pm to 8.30pm there will be delegate's assembly by zoom to decide on priorities for this year. Fr. Chris encourages people to sign up for it and to contact him on chris1707hughes@live.co.uk in order to register for the event.

Minsteracres Eco Community

Lya Vollering explained how the aim of the eco community at Minsteracres is to live closely to nature and thereby relate in a different way to the earth. The earth is not a collection of objects but a community. It can be hard to adjust our mindset and live in a way which values co-creation; one which is based on biodiversity, sustainability and sharing. Lya has recently been joined by 2 other community members, Scott and Michael. Together they are developing a community where the values of co creation can be lived out in a simple way.

Lya then led our closing liturgy using images of the walled garden to encourage us to meditate on the natural world, our place in it and the responsibility we have as stewards of God's Creation.