

Vocation for Justice

Spring 2024 Volume 38 No 1



Our Right to Protest

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VIGILS**
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Social Teaching



Columbans and colleagues carried banners, 'Stand with the Pope, Stand up to Fossil Fuels' and 'Save our Earth' at UK marches on 9 December 2023 to support Climate Action at COP28.

How shall we defend our right to protest in the future?

COLUMBAN MISSION

Collaborating with the National Justice and Peace Network of England and Wales & Justice and Peace Scotland

I have a long memory of public protests: from 'playing dead' in the street outside London's US embassy in the 1980s urging dismantling of nuclear weapons, to joining Columban colleagues forming a chain of debt campaigners around world leaders in Cologne in 1999 for Jubilee 2000. We were also at the million-strong anti-Iraq war rally in Hyde Park on 15 February 2003 and, most recently, the 9 December Climate march in London, which is featured on our front cover.

We gather to mourn, express anger and demand change in response to national or world events. The ability to stand up for what we believe in is a fundamental right – one that all of us, no matter what causes move us, hold dear. And it is essential to a healthy and functioning democracy, helping force politicians to listen ... even though they often don't appear to!

Protest is also a vital safety valve, giving people an outlet for their emotions, whether about the UK government awarding new North Sea oil and gas licences, the cost-of-living crisis, or the killing of civilians in Gaza.

Many of us have felt alarm in recent months at the UK government's response to protests regarding conflict in the Holy Land, refugee policy and towards strikes by trade unionists. Confusion has been sown about the law, creating uncertainty about what consequences people might face for taking to the streets. Some are discouraged by fear of arrest. Yet during a time of escalating global conflict, it is more important than ever that our decision makers are accessible and accountable to the public.

Undemocratic threats and the criminalisation of protest must be challenged. Legislation - such as Public Order Act 2023 - has clamped down on protest, giving the police new powers to restrict

demonstrations and creating new offences that specifically target types of protest. See our Action Ideas on page 11.

Many campaigners for more serious climate action at December's COP28 climate summit in Dubai reported afterwards that the space for protest had dramatically shrunk from the vibrant street protests at COP26 in Glasgow. While young climate activists from different parts of the world tried to make their presence felt, they were vastly outnumbered by oil and gas lobbyists and other businesses. "Other people had access in the negotiations room, but civil society never had that access" said one young campaigner; "it's a clear threat to civil society's presence."

Religious Links provides ideas for addressing this on page 8.

But protests by climate activism groups did get somewhere. A global day of action in nearly 300 cities in 52 countries helped bring the phase out of fossil fuels to top of the agenda and a focus on the clean energy transition. COP28 marked the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era and operationalised a fund for climate damages. In the year ahead, Columbans will be supporting campaigns to close the loopholes and plug funding holes to help climate-vulnerable communities. And we've seen early in the New Year how these include communities and regions in the UK flooded out by severe weather.

And there is the issue of mainstream media's coverage of protests being weak unless there are dramatic elements to them. The anti-Arms Trade vigils at London's ExCel arms fair in September, and Christian Climate Action's vigil outside the London meeting of oil and gas company CEOs in October are two examples. *Vocation for Justice* and Columban social media try to address this. But let's not forget the murdered journalists of Gaza

– nearly 80 of them - who risked their lives to get stories out. And those journalists in the UK challenging the UK government for responding to just a third of freedom of information requests in relation to public bodies.

Faith groups have long promoted integrity in public life, the value of hope and the importance of helping marginalised communities dream of a better future. We must sidestep misguided claims of "being too political". For Catholics there is plenty of Catholic Social Teaching to quote from, as highlighted on our 'Spirituality page'. In the latest papal exhortation 'Laudate Deum' Pope Francis stressed the vital role of radical nonviolent action.

So, this edition of *Vocation for Justice* focuses on the right to protest. Our next edition will focus on engagement with the next General Election. We cannot be indifferent to such issues at home as increasing UK poverty, pollution of our waterways, and the refugee homelessness scandal. And what about mounting international demands for climate justice, nurturing biodiversity and peace?

Democracy, along with human and environmental rights, are hard to win and easy to lose. Let us be part of the people-powered movement for virtuous citizenship, as shown in our centrespread.

Columbans believe in reimagining as a way of resisting acceptance of injustice and violence. We celebrate a vision of a world of communities that together embrace the diversity of the human family and live justly and peaceably with all creation.

Finally, may I remind you that our 2024 Schools Media Competition 'Biodiversity Matters' closes on 17 February - Poster on page 11. Please alert young people 13-18 that they are invited to submit a piece of writing or image. ■

Ellen Teague

Protest in Catholic Social Teaching

Jane Lavery

Jane is a member of the Columban Justice, Peace and Ecology Team. She examines the inspiration of Catholic Social Teaching for identifying and tackling structural sin. And she suggests that protest is a part of discipleship.

'With the increase of lawlessness, love in most people will grow cold; but anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved. This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed to the whole world as evidence to the nations' (Matt 24: 12-14).

Jesus' teaching is the basis for all Catholic Social Teaching (CST). He gave us the story of the sheep and the goats: *'In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me' (Matt 25:40).* And he told us to *'love one another just as I have loved you' (John 13:34).*

Paul, the apostle of the gentiles, tells us that our heritage, status and gender are immaterial because, *'you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28).* The Hebrew Bible is also full of reminders about how to treat others – to care for the stranger, and the widows and orphans.

Modern CST has a rich vein of care for the vulnerable, starting in 1891 with Pope Leo XIII's *'Rerum Novarum'* ('Of Things New'), which talks about the 'Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour', including encouraging Trade Unions which

work 'for the common good'. In 1963 Pope John XXIII published *'Pacem in Terris'* ('Peace on Earth') on establishing universal peace in truth, justice, charity and liberty. In 1965 the Second Vatican Council published *'Gaudium et Spes'* ('The Church in the Modern World, full of 'Joy and Hope'), which is extremely authoritative on CST and worth reading.

In 1967 Pope Paul VI published *'Populorum Progressio'* ('On the Development of Peoples'), the opening paragraph of which reads: *'The progressive development of peoples is an object of deep interest and concern to the Church. This is particularly true in the case of those peoples who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance; of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth'.* This is 'the preferential option for the poor' and 'solidarity' in a nutshell.

And Pope Francis has a global reputation for promoting care for our beautiful planet. He says in *'Laudato Si'* (2015): *'We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis that is both social and environmental'.* CST insists on Christians being aware of and working with all the created world in order that the Kingdom of God should come on Earth as it is in Heaven.

CST then is an amalgam of the teachings of the Church (not only from Popes, but also from Synods and Bishops' Conferences, both national and regional), and of the words of scripture, particularly those of Jesus, whom we are called to follow.

But Jesus doesn't only tell us how to live; he also tells us to pray for what we need. He says, *'Ask, and it will be given to you' (Luke 11:9),* and gives us one of my favourite stories about the persistent widow and the unscrupulous judge who finally gives her what she wants *'since she keeps pestering me' (Luke 18:5).* God, to whom we pray and whose kingdom we are trying to establish, is not an unscrupulous judge, but is loving, just and generous, as is Jesus Christ, our role model. God shares and understands our desire for a fair and peaceful world.

Jesus tells us to take up our cross and follow him. Does he mean us to take up our cross in the form of a protest banner that demands a fair and peaceful world? Does he expect us to carry our cross into prison, if when we protest about inequality, injustice or malpractice we are breaking the law of the land? If we listen to Jesus' teachings, and the teachings of the Church, and ask the earthly powers to implement them, can we, should we become criminals? Jesus spoke truth to power, and it resulted in his death. Are we, as followers of Jesus, prepared to carry the protest banners that speak the truth to those who don't want to hear it? ■



Columban campaigning at COP26 in Glasgow.

Confronting Power Structures

Mark Campanale

The writer is Director of the Carbon Tracker Initiative.

Christian Climate Action



Highlighting climate impacts outside a London meeting of oil executives in October.

Catholics and other people of faith have a proud history of confronting existing power structures and delivering significant global change. Past examples of this include the slavery abolitionists in the UK, the fight for Civil Rights in the US, and the Solidarity movement in Poland.

If we are going to deal with the biggest challenge of our age, climate change, a strong moral voice that calls for change must be heard.

Given the size and scope of the problem and the global energy system that fuels climate change this can seem overwhelming. However, there are clear actions that we can take to address this problem in both the financial and civic arenas.

As a Church with over 1 billion members globally, if we are willing to act, we do have the power to bring change. As a speaker at the recent Energy Intelligence Forum held in London for oil and gas professionals, I was able to reflect on what could be achieved given the climate emergency and the role of people in positions of influence or responsibility, beyond the important role that the climate protestors played outside the Forum.

Pope Francis's leadership in telling oil and gas companies that the world cannot continue exploring and using fossil fuels and the Vatican's support for the Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty (www.fossilfueltreaty.org) reflects the strength of the Pope's message in *Laudato Si*. He called for "the elimination of fossil fuels" in his address to COP28 on 2 December.

However, we still need to go further.

As Catholics we should call on the Vatican Bank and all Catholic pension funds and the reserves of multiple healthcare trusts and religious orders to announce that they will divest from fossil fuel companies that have not aligned their businesses with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Similar steps have already been taken by the Church of England. Once funds are moved away from the fossil fuel sector, we should follow the lead of groups such as the Catholic Impact Investing Collaborative (CIIC), led by the Francesco Collaborative team. Church leaders can increase investments in carbon neutral investments and other social and

environmental measures to help climate vulnerable communities.

Increased civil society pressure in this area is needed. At Carbon Tracker we recently found in the report *Absolute Impact 2023* that of 25 of the world's largest listed oil and gas companies, none of them are fully aligned with the Paris goals.

In addition to acting alone, one way for the Church to magnify its impact is for those with financial assets to join the Climate Action 100+ initiative (CA100+). This organisation is made up of over 700 global investors who want the largest corporate greenhouse gas emitters to act on climate change. Currently the CA100+ includes religious denominations such as the Church of England, Church of Sweden, and the US Presbyterian Church.

Over the years, at international conferences and negotiations like the recent COP28, we have seen the embedded power of the fossil fuel sector. Their network of lobbyists and supportive elected officials has created a strong opposition to meaningful action. To push back against this, and ultimately defeat it, we need a robust response from civil society.

This pushback must be rooted in a clear call that recognises the moral need to wind down the fossil fuel sector as a way to combat climate damage and protect the most vulnerable in our world. Such a message can galvanise popular support for turning climate targets into reality.

Our Catholic faith, its teachings, and history of speaking out against injustices, give us the ability to make that case and use it to rally others to action. Putting that message out should happen not only in our discussions with fellow believers but also those of different faiths – such as the Pope's joint declaration at COP28 – or even along with those with no religious beliefs. Given the size of the problem and urgency, this is a call that needs to be heard in our >

> communities and by our leaders in business and government.

When Pope Francis issued the encyclical letter *Laudato Si* it was a moment of great excitement. Seeing Pontifex speak out on these issues was inspiring and seemed to rally the Church. However, in the years since we have only seen the problems connected to climate change worsen as greenhouse gas emissions have risen. Seeing extreme weather increase and temperature records broken routinely it is easy to get discouraged.

Now is not the time for pessimism or defeat. Given the rapid deployment of cheap renewables globally, below the cost of fossil fuels, those in the global south or living on the edge of poverty can look forward to a new era of low energy prices, available for all, not just the few.

So as we go forward, we should remember *Galatians 6:9* 'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.' This verse applies to the fight against climate change and should motivate us to put our faith into action and address this challenge. It is our time to carry on the legacy of using faith to confront power structures, create global change, and bring forward a more just world. ■

Credit: Mark Campanale spent 20 years in sustainable finance, via various asset management business managing endowments, pension funds and retail money. His non profit, the Carbon Tracker Initiative, has offices in the USA and UK and provides free research for asset owners on climate risk and the clean energy transition. He is an advisor to FaithInvest.

Faithful Finance Online Training

An online course designed to demystify faith-consistent investing. Find out how your organisation can bridge the gap between faith and finance by visiting www.faithinvest.org/training

4 x 90min sessions between Feb 28 and Mar 20, 2024

Columbans join calls for Ceasefire in Gaza

Source: Christlan Aid

The Columban Director in Britain, Fr John Boles, joined an ecumenical group of Christian churches and organisations on 18 December to issue a joint statement calling for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza. The death toll had mounted to more than 20,000 Palestinians, including 8,000 children.

They called for "an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire" in the Israel-Gaza conflict, saying: "Without a ceasefire, the foundations cannot be laid for a sustainable and just peace, in which all people in Israel and Palestine can live in security and with dignity." They had "grave concerns about the use of arms supplied by the UK to Israel, in possible breach of international humanitarian law". And noted that, the UK government had yet to unequivocally condemn Israel for the mass killing of civilians in Gaza in the same way it condemned Hamas for atrocities.

Other signatories included Archbishop of Glasgow William Nolan, Patrick Watt - chief executive of Christian Aid, and Tim Livesey - chief executive of Embrace the Middle East. Other organisations represented included Churches Together in England, Quakers in Britain, Iona Community, Justice and Peace Scotland and Pax Christi Scotland.

The group called for:

- an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire
- the unconditional and immediate release of all hostages
- the UK Government to call out any actions or use of language by those in positions of power that contribute to forcible transfer, ethnic cleansing, collective punishment, and other causes of civilian suffering.
- UK support for international accountability mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court, to investigate all allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity by any party to the conflict, and for the UK Government to contribute funding to an ICC investigation in a similar way to the support provided to the ICC's work on Ukraine.
- the UK Government to conduct a transparent review of arms and military components sold from the UK and used by the Israeli military, and to suspend licences and sales until it can demonstrate that no UK-manufactured arms have been used in violation of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory. ■



Catholic peace activists Virginia Moffatt and Chris Cole were arrested at Downing Street on 29 December after pouring fake blood and putting bloody handprints on the gates, saying the UK government had "blood on its hands" after failing to demand that Israel end its bombing of Gaza. They were charged with criminal damage.

PROTESTS..... CAMPAIGNS..... VIGILS

PRAYER AND PEACEMAKING

A silent candlelit prayer witness was held on 11 September 2023, the night before the opening of the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) fair at the ExCel Centre in East London. It was part of a 10-day protest outside the UK's largest arms fair. Organised by Pax Christi England and Wales and the Quakers, the vigil outside the gates saw around 175 peace activists – including the Columban Justice, Peace and Ecology (JPE) team - pray quietly as security guards looked on.

In advance of the protests, the Department for International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales released a statement saying: "Through hosting one of the world's largest arms fairs, our country is complicit in fuelling conflicts around the world which destroy lives, drive people from their homes, trap communities in poverty, and damage the environment. We send our prayers and best wishes to all those who, inspired by Christ's call to be peacemakers, oppose the arms fair."



Columban JPE, Pax Christi and others pray outside the arms fair.

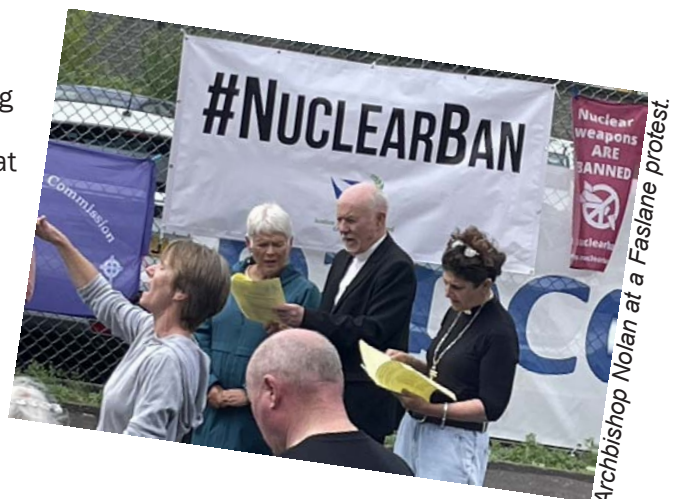
VIGILS FOR REFUGEES

On 18 December, the last of 2023's monthly vigils for refugees outside the Home Office in London called for the UK to be "a more welcoming nation". Representatives of Westminster Justice and Peace Commission, London Catholic Worker and London Churches Refugee Fund were present. James Trewby, head of the Columban Justice, Peace and Ecology team, spoke at the October vigil. He said, "I pray that our country repents from its shameful failure to welcome people in need, and I encourage all of us to continue to campaign for change, for safe passage, for dignity in our asylum process, for welcome."

Columbans have helped to run Fatima House in Birmingham Archdiocese for over seven years, providing assistance to nearly 60 asylum-seeking women who have found themselves in destitution. The house has been transformed into a sanctuary where these women can experience a sense of welcome and safety.

EDUCATION ABOUT CHURCH POLICY ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Archbishop Willam Nolan of Glasgow spoke at Scottish CND's 'Festival for Survival' in Glasgow on 4 November 2023, affirming "the Catholic Church's opposition to nuclear weapons." He said this dates back to John XXIII's 'Pacem in Terris' which stated that nuclear weapons should be banned – "a constant teaching which was manifested most recently by the Holy See being among the first to ratify the UN treaty banning nuclear weapons." Archbishop Nolan highlighted that, "Vatican II condemned the use of nuclear weapons as immoral and Pope Francis has emphasised the immorality both of production and possession of these weapons and the resources they consume which could be spent on the poor."



Archbishop Nolan at a Faslane protest.

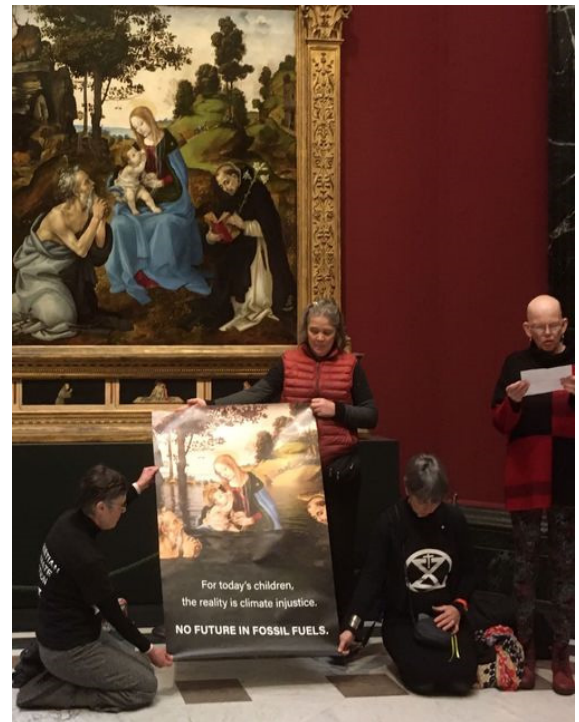
COLUMBAN LIFESTYLE

The Columbans will plant over 2000 trees and hedgerows at its Solihull offices during a tree-planting day on 13 February. This is in line with the Columban commitment to enhance biodiversity. People from local parishes, including teenagers from a Confirmation Group, will be taking part.

PROTESTS..... CAMPAIGNS..... VIGILS

UK PROTESTS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Five Christian women held a Nativity-themed climate change protest inside the National Gallery in London on 15 December 2023. Members of Christian Climate Action stood in front of a 15th-century Filippino Lippi painting of the Virgin and Child, which depicts Mary seated in a landscape feeding Jesus. They held a poster of the painting, altered to show a climate-ravaged landscape, and handed out postcards with this image and facts about the impact of the climate crisis on the world's children. They didn't touch the actual painting.



Christian Climate Action at National Gallery.

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST FOSSIL FUELS

CAFOD and other Catholic agencies lobbied throughout the COP28 climate summit in December for an end to fossil fuel extraction. The Laudato Si' Movement commended the interfaith endorsement of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. At COP28 the Pacific nation of Nauru became the 12th nation-state to formally support the treaty. On 5 December an online meeting, 'A Global Catholic Letter to COP28 Presidency' involved Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Suva in Fiji, whose Pacific nation is on the frontline of climate impacts.

COP28 Lobby outside BP's London office.



The Faith Pavilion at COP28 was effective. Visits to the pavilion in the closing days of COP28 included India's Minister of Environment, who supports enhancing the role of religious leaders in climate action, and Jeffrey Sachs, President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network who applauded the leading role played by Pope Francis. In London on 9 December, Columban JPE, Jesuit Missions, Franciscans, Salesians, CAFOD and Westminster J&P prayed outside BP's London Office for an end to fossil fuel extraction.

FAITHFUL FINANCE

Hundreds of Catholic institutions around the globe – including over half of the Catholic dioceses in England and Wales – have announced plans to divest from fossil fuels. FaithInvest is offering a four-week 'Faithful Finance' course, starting 28 February 2024, to introduce aligning investments with values. It is aimed at people in leadership or finance roles in faith-based organisations and will be offered in four 90-minute modules. The course costs £295, though a limited number of bursaries are available. FaithInvest CEO Dr Lorna Gold says: "We are on the cusp of a great change but the question in all of this is where is the moral leadership, as well as the financial leadership, coming from? Faith communities must lead the way – because in all our investment decisions, there's a moral risk, an economic risk and an environmental risk."



'Financing a Liveable Future' Conference, London 7 November 2023.

Credits: Pax Christi, Scotland J&P, CCA, Jesuit Missions, Operation Noah.

The Erosion of Civic Space

Sr Gillian Price FC

'The erosion of civic space - Democracy under threat' was the theme of a one-day conference, organised by JPIC Religious Links last October. Columban Ray Collier was among those meeting at the FCJ centre in London.

The day was facilitated by Rosemary Forest from Bond UK, an organisation which strengthens a dynamic network of civil society organisations to eradicate global poverty and injustice.

Rosemary defined civic space as: "The environment in which civil society exists, online or offline. It refers to the political, legal regulatory, policy, social, cultural, economic and security context civil society operates in as well as the rights and freedoms it needs to function, especially the rights to freedom of assembly and association, to freedom of expression and opinion, to information and to participation."

Rosemary gave examples of how civic space may be restricted globally, including:

Limits on access - eg limits on public access to information and data held by public bodies.

Laws and regulations - Limits on the issues that groups can work on and the types of activities they can undertake: Laws that seek to censor dissenting voices.

Security and policing - Detention and arrest of activists; Restrictions on protests and criminalisation, intimidation and use of force on protesters.

Digital and online - Online or digital surveillance and unfettered use of digital technologies.

Harassment and intimidation - Stigmatisation of activists and journalists including reputational attacks and surveillance.

Physical violence - Physical attacks and killings of protesters, activists and journalists, or their families and relatives.



JPIC Religious Links at the October meeting.

Sadly, when we thought about where we saw civic space being eroded in the UK - personal examples came thick and fast. If civil society is unable to operate this will have a negative impact on all aspects of society, but particularly on transparency and accountability, representation and participation and the effectiveness of government policies and services.

In September 2021, CIVICUS - an international alliance dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society internationally - placed the UK on the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist. It said civic space in the UK has declined rapidly and significantly over the last two years. In January 2023 Human Rights Watch warned the UK risks being added to its list of global human rights abusers. In March 2023 CIVICUS downgraded the UK to 'obstructed' status which means that civic space is heavily contested by power holders who undermine civil society by illegal activities and demeaning public statements.

The UK is using a variety of means to erode the civic space, including:

Legislation which reduces accountability and impacts human

rights, including preventing public bodies from making boycott; divestment and sanctions decisions that are not in line with UK foreign interests;

Damaging narratives in the media and among politicians;

Undermining and threatening

organisations - eg MPs reporting charities to the Charity commission for being too 'political'.

Some sections of civil society are targeted and face greater risks than others, particularly those who hold powerful actors to account or challenge vested interests, such as journalists and whistle-blowers, anti-corruption

campaigners, environmental activists and land rights defenders. Then there are those who represent the rights of minority religious or ethnic groups or indigenous communities.

To do:

- We agreed that it was important to build relationships with MPs and prospective MPs. Get to know your MP and find common values.

- Write letters to the editor of your local and national press, and use of social media to shed light on the issues.

- Get involved in some of the many initiatives that are already underway to create political will to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

- Involve Church members and encourage Church leaders to speak out against toxic narratives. How can we involve Catholic Bishops? How do we build coalitions of like-minded Christians?

- Start to prepare for the 2024 election by planning now for an election hustling in each constituency, perhaps working with the Churches Together Network. ■

Bond UK: www.bond.org.uk/
CIVICUS: <https://monitor.civicus.org/about/>

Putting Environment Rights Into Law

Nick Hawkes

The Columbans recently signed up to 'Nature 2030'. Our writer, from Wildlife and Countryside link, explains.

Sometimes you have to remind yourself that a degraded environment shouldn't be normal. But for many of us, the sad fact is that it has become the norm. In communities across the UK, a healthy natural world has been relegated to an 'aspiration' or a 'nice to have' rather than an essential part of our everyday lives.

But nature is no add-on, it has a huge role to play, not just in the health of our planet but for our own wellbeing. Put simply, without a healthy environment, people's mental and physical health will suffer and their lives risk being cut short.

Despite growing public concern for the degradation of the environment, the UK government has to date failed to rise to the scale of the policy challenge. In the words of the Office for Environmental Protection, "the current pace and scale of action will not deliver the changes necessary to significantly improve the environment"

The cost of this failure is immense and it is not just our natural world that is suffering.

It is well-known that local access to nature improves people's mental and physical health yet one in three people in the UK live in homes with limited access to the natural world and disadvantaged communities are twice as likely to be nature-poor. Throughout the UK, people are paying the price for the continued inaction of decision-makers to stand up for environmental justice and take the right to a healthy environment seriously.

Take air pollution, identified by the House of Commons EFRA Committee as one of the largest environmental risks to public health - responsible for almost 65,000 premature

deaths and estimated to cost the health service around £2 billion. Despite this, in 2024, the Government plans to get rid of rules which require emissions reduction plans to be published to improve air quality.

These actions fly in the face of not only the communities who will be affected but also the UK's own international commitments.

Just over 25 years ago the UK signed up to a groundbreaking agreement. The Aarhus Convention was supposed to pave the way for a future where policy was more open and transparent, where decisions were taken with future generations in mind and where the public had a right to information and a say on laws which would affect the environment. Despite this, in the years which have followed progress has been non-existent.

More recently, in 2021, when the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution recognising 'the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment' as a 'human right that is important for the enjoyment of human rights', the UK Government gave its support. However, it did so with an asterisk, clarifying that the government saw these rights as 'aspirational' and not legally binding, the only Aarhus signatory to do so.



UK water users are swimming in toxic cocktail of pollution. Campaigns call for water companies to clean up their act.

As countries around the world begin to recognise the importance of environmental justice and introduce laws which safeguard those rights, the UK runs the risk of falling dangerously far behind. But with the next election on the horizon, there is an opportunity for decision-makers to demonstrate what real 'aspiration' can look like.

An Environmental Rights Bill, as proposed by the Nature 2030 campaign, could deliver the required ambition. Such a Bill would establish a right to a healthy environment for all, supporting people in living healthier, happier, more prosperous lives. The Bill would also require all public bodies to account for environmental rights in their decision-making process, would allow for a more collaborative approach to policymaking and encourage long-term thinking which puts nature's recovery and community health at the heart of the agenda. It would also provide legal tools to enable the public to challenge actions by government and businesses which cause harm to the environment, would help to address the widening power imbalance which many communities are confronted with and may make organisations think twice before taking similar actions in future.

Environmental justice isn't a radical idea but it requires decision-makers to remedy the injustice of years of 'aspirational' environmental promises failing to be backed up with action.

Through the Nature 2030 campaign, over 100 nature, climate, access and health organisations have joined forces to demand political leaders see that a healthy environment is no longer seen as a nice to have but a right for all. ■

Find out more about the campaign and add your voice to the open letter at:
www.wcl.org.uk/Nature2030



Members of the Columban Justice, Peace and Ecology Team (l-r): Jane Lavery, Frs Ed O'Connell, Daniel O'Malley and Kevin McDonagh, Hannah Loneragan, Sr Kate Midgley, James Trewby, Anna Blackman, Ellen Teague.

NJPN Conference: 'Just Politics'

This year's annual conference of the National Justice and Peace Network – 19-21 July 2024 in Derbyshire – takes the theme, 'Just Politics'. It will explore the need for truth and integrity in the public space, based on the values of Catholic Social Teaching. Theological reflection will help discernment on how faith can influence actions in a year when elected representatives are likely to be calling for support. <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/>

Columban action for COP28: "We want Climate Justice Now"

The Global Day of Action, coinciding with December's COP28 climate summit in Dubai, was supported by the Columbans. In Central London, prayers were said outside the office of BP - highlighting that BP "makes billions while fuelling climate breakdown," - and BAE Systems - to protest that militarisation and war have a heavy carbon footprint. Another Columban group led by James Trewby attended an event in Birmingham, carrying banners made by the pupils of St Bernard's Catholic Primary School.

Artificial Intelligence must serve peace, says Pope

Pope Francis' Message for the World Peace Day on 1 January, focused on Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is an umbrella term for a range of technologies and approaches that often attempt to

mimic human thought to solve complex tasks. "We must make sure that AI is put at the service of peace in the world, rather than being a threat, and that it makes a beneficial contribution to humanity's future," he said. He urged the international community to adopt a binding international treaty that regulates AI's development and use. Pope Francis expressed particular concern about the "weaponisation of artificial intelligence." Further details from Pax Christi at <https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday/>

Call for debt cancellation and climate finance

Following COP28, where rich countries pledged more than \$700m for financial support to communities suffering irreversible damage due to the climate emergency, CAFOD said, "many more billions will be required to meet the scale of destruction." More than 20 faith and development leaders from the UK and Africa had already urged UK political parties to commit to cancel the debts of low-income countries to release funds for climate finance. "The UK has an opportunity to be a beacon of hope and compassion, leading the way to a fairer and more just global financial system," commented Bishop Stephen Wright of Hexham and Newcastle, Chair of CAFOD, and Bishop Brian McGee of Argyll and the Isles, President of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF).

Welcoming refugees a priority

Bishop Paul McAleenan, the lead bishop for migrants and refugees, said he was "deeply saddened" to hear of the suicide of an asylum seeker on board the Bibby Stockholm barge in December. He called for, "an immigration system that defends the fundamental human dignity of those on the move, prioritises the sanctity of life and provides access to decent accommodation and healthcare." And Cardinal Vincent Nichols joined him and other faith leaders across London to jointly call on the Home Office to address rising

homelessness of newly recognised refugees. A letter to the Home Office called on it to "ensure that all refugees have a minimum of 28 days from receiving their Biometric Residence Permit before they are required to leave their asylum accommodation in line with Home Office policy." And Jesuit Refugee Service is among the faith groups urging the scrapping of the Rwanda scheme - "a cruel and unworkable plan, that will violate the rights of refugees."



As part of CAFOD's 'Fix the Food System' campaign, over 70,000 Catholics signed a letter - delivered to the World Bank's UK offices by a delegation including Fr Rob Esdaile - urging it to stop supporting policies that limit small farmers' choices over seeds.

LENT VIGIL & RESOURCE

The 'No Faith in Fossil Fuels' Lent Vigil

is a 10-day event set to take place outside the Westminster Parliament. Christians will gather from Ash Wednesday, 14 February. Organisers - including Green Christian, Operation Noah and Christian Climate Action - aim to "bear witness to the impacts of the climate crisis and pray for the UK Government to take bold climate action." <https://greenchristian.org.uk/join-our-no-faith-in-fossil-fuels-lent-vigil/>

Church Action on Poverty has produced a six-week Lent course for church groups on practical activism, titled 'Act on Poverty'. <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk>

Action Ideas

Truth and Integrity Declaration

Quakers in the UK are concerned that standards of truth and integrity in politics, public and commercial life and social media are being undermined to the extent that democracy itself is under threat.

They are concerned that many in power would seem to act with impunity, disregarding facts and scientific findings.

This is set against a backdrop of the climate emergency and increasing inequality and polarisation.

The Quaker Truth and Integrity Group is trying to promote a better kind of politics. It has developed a Declaration 'Truth and Integrity: Finding Common Ground'. It wants to promote a more participative democracy and constitutional reform that will allow for MPs to be more responsive to the needs of their constituents rather than other vested interests. They also want to promote higher standards of truth telling in the media.

www.quakertruth.org

Ending corporate impunity

Of the 100 largest economic entities in the world, 69 are corporations and only 31 are countries. In their pursuit of huge profits, big business too often gets away with exploiting people and the planet. Communities are displaced, for example, to make space for new projects or exploited in brutal working conditions. While corporations operate across borders, laws are still primarily nationally based. To date, there is almost no legally binding international regulation of corporations.

Nearly all attempts to hold corporations to account at an international level have been voluntary and therefore unenforceable. Movements and organisations around the world are now cooperating to push for a Binding UN Treaty to regulate corporations and have binding rules for corporations on human rights.

<https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/our-campaigns/climate/ending-corporate-impunity/>

Right to Protest

On 4 December Liberty condemned as 'staggering and shocking' more than 600 arrests of climate protesters over the previous month, many for slow marches on roads. Liberty criticised new anti-protest legislation coming into force, saying that the Public Order Act was endangering civil liberties. The UK may even leave the European Convention on Human Rights. Liberty said, "it's shocking to see hundreds of young protesters criminalised simply for standing up for what they believe in." On 15 December a *Just Stop Oil* activist was jailed for six months after pleading guilty to taking part in a peaceful slow march protest on a London road opposing new fossil fuel production. Liberty said: "Protest is a fundamental right, not a gift from the state. Government should be protecting our right to protest, not criminalising it."

<https://action.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/page/133001/petition/1>

SCHOOLS MEDIA COMPETITION 2024

Columban Missionaries invite students aged 13-18 to submit an original piece of writing or image on the theme:

Biodiversity Matters

Explore Biodiversity, which humanity relies on for health, food and well-being.

DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES IS SATURDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2024

For entry details: www.columbancompetition.com

WRITTEN PRIZES

- 1ST £500
- 2ND £250
- 3RD £150

IMAGE PRIZES

- 1ST £500
- 2ND £250
- 3RD £150

COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES BRITAIN

Resources

Bodies on the Line, Christians, Civil Resistance and the Climate Crisis by Sue Parfitt

Revd Sue Parfitt, 81, a retired Anglican priest and member of Christian Climate Action, examines - from a Christian perspective - the importance of protest in this time of climate and environmental breakdown. She feels the need to challenge embedded injustices which enable unbridled exploitation of nature, environment and people. ISBN: 978-1-7397-1628-8

The Peace Protestors: A history of modern-day war resistance Symon Hill

Wherever there is war, there will be people who resist it. This book tells some of their stories. ISBN: 9781399007863

Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and World Pax Christi International

Church leaders, community organisers, and theologians look at how the Catholic Church might return to its Gospel nonviolence roots and transform the world. <https://paxchristi.net/2020/10/26/new-book-advancingnonviolence/>

Bringing Down Goliath Jolyon Maugham KC

The founder of the Good Law Project believes in using the law for prompting positive change. ISBN-10: 0753559781

Monopoly Capitalism: What it is and how do we fight it? Global Justice Now

Looks at the concentration of wealth and power in our economy and the growth of civil society movements to tackle it. Download: <https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/resource/monopoly-capitalism-what-is-it-and-how-do-we-fight-it/>

Oxfam says emissions from the investments of 125 billionaires is a million times higher than emissions of 90% of the world's population. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-emit-much-planet-heating-pollution-two-thirds-humanity>

The Future by Naomi Alderman

Are a few billionaires leading the world to destruction? <https://harpercollins.co.uk/products/the-future-naomi-alderman>

Philanthrocapitalism and the Erosion of Democracy Edited by Vandana Shiva

Shiva exposes the reckless use of philanthropy by technophile capitalists who are insensitive to the needs of people and planet. ISBN: 97809077919

AI: How little has to go wrong?

A Responsible Science briefing and survey covering such issues as autonomous weapons, driverless cars and spies in the home. https://www.sgr.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-01/SGR_AI_Briefing.pdf

Two Champions of the Environment e-book Compiled by Sr Janet Fearn Redemptorist Publications ISBN: 9780852316023

Climate Generation- Awakening to our Children's Future Lorna Gold

Revised, including a new preface. ISBN: 9781800970731

DVD- Conflict and Climate Change Movement for Abolition of War

A DVD, with a study booklet produced by Columban JPE. See taster at: <https://www.kevinmayhew.com/products/conflict-and-climate-change-1501412> Details for ordering DVD at end.

FOR LENT

DVD- Stations of the Forests + resource booklet Columbans

Laments devastation of rainforests and tribal people. £7.00 inclusive of p&p or view at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ancWU2YInHE>

Wild Goose Big Book of Liturgies and Resources 3 Iona Community

Offers worship materials, including resources for Lent. www.ionabooks.com

Resources from CAFOD at www.cafod.org.uk

Resources from Pax Christi England and Wales at: www.paxchristi.org.uk/prayer-and-seasonal

Lenten Reflection Guide: Caring for Creation Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

A 14-page guide for download. It offers reflections, small group questions, prayers, and actions based on Gospel readings and concerns raised by Maryknoll missionaries and affiliates with experience of caring for creation. Guide on website: <https://mogc.info/Lent2024>

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VOCATION FOR JUSTICE

Columban JPE Team, edited by Ellen Teague
St Columban's, Widney Manor Road, Solihull, West Midlands B93 9AB.
Tel: 01564 772 096 E-mail: V4J@columbans.co.uk

Website: www.columbans.co.uk, f: Columbans UK t: @columbansUK

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