



Vocation for Justice

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***Peace be
with you all***



***Pope Leo blesses a glacier at
last October's 'Raising Hope'
Conference.
Reports on pages 6-7.***

The theme for Peace Sunday on 18 January is: "Peace be with you all: Towards an 'unarmed and disarming' Peace." What does this mean for us today? See page 11.

(Photo: Pope Leo with Lorna Gold of the Laudato Si Movement.)

COLUMBAN MISSION

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

EDITORIAL

"Amazing" is the word that comes to mind, as I write this editorial, to describe the fact we are celebrating 40 years of "Vocation for Justice" this year.

In 1986, along with Mike Kelly, we started this contact newsletter as a way of keeping in touch with those we met at J&P events all over Britain. That this newsletter has appeared three times a year for 40 years is down to one person, Ellen Teague, for her tenacious dedication to promoting justice, peace and ecology issues. So Ellen, for representing the Columbans at so many events over all these years, a deep felt thank you.

As I look back over more than 50 years of missionary life, I want to appreciate the lives of two spiritual and theological giants of our lifetime: Gustavo Gutiérrez and St Oscar Romero. I and many more have been shaped by their teaching and example. Seeing things from the standpoint of the poor became the cornerstone of our theology and pastoral response. Encouraging and empowering people, in parishes or groups mostly of women and young people, became the way to work. I was delighted to see Pope Leo reaffirm this, in an interview for his biography in Peru published in an article by Justin McLellan in the National Catholic Reporter: "Liberation theology, from the perspective of Gustavo Gutiérrez, is to begin to see through the eyes of the poor and with the poor in order to understand how God is in and among us."

I remember in late 1979 and early 1980 how the young people in Columban parishes in Peru were listening, live on radio, to the weekly Sunday homilies of St Oscar Romero in San Salvador. His incredible courage denouncing the many injustices and calling for an end to torture, disappearances and arbitrary killings. His death, whilst celebrating the Eucharist was a Christ-like witness of martyrdom,



Ed O'Connell (right) with Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark at the Romero Trust Mass on 1 November.

and the grief of his loss was soon overcome by the belief he lived on in the lives of the Salvadorean people. They declared him a saint, then and there, and he continues to inspire us today.

After the Oscar Romero Trust 20th Anniversary Thanksgiving Mass at St George's Cathedral last November, I chatted with theologian Margaret Hebblethwaite. She talked of having attended the Latin American and Caribbean Theology Congress last October in Lima and I quote from her article in *The Tablet* (8/11/25) about it: "Liberation theology, which emerged in Latin America in the 1970s, has been given renewed vigour by the papacies of Francis and Leo, with a new emphasis today on synodality, women, Indigenous people, and the cry of Mother Earth."

Now more than ever we are challenged to see Synodality (being Church together) from the standpoint of ordinary folk in church benches and of the many who over the past 50 years stopped practising; Or see the Indigenous People, from the standpoint of their natural habitat, respecting their way of life, remembering their martyred leaders, including women religious; Or Women from the standpoint of their contributions to family, church and society so often ignored, and sadly the growing number abused, killed and

disappeared; Of Mother Earth - the Brazilian theologian Geraldina Cespedes links oppression of women with the destruction of Mother Earth – both symptoms of machismo, man's arrogant appropriation of power; And of Migrants and Asylum Seekers seen from where they are, in detention centres or in hotel bedrooms for long periods and no opportunity to contribute positively to their situation.

I'd love, if it were possible, for the Bishops of England and Wales to update the *Common Good* statement of nearly 30 years ago and bring it out again. It is so necessary to reach out across parish and diocesan boundaries, indeed reach out to other denominations and faiths and to all people of goodwill to build coalitions that respect the dignity of each and every person and be prepared to voice our need for the *Common Good*.

What remains is to say a big thank you to all those who have read *Vocation for Justice* over the years and with whom we have travelled together responding to the Cry of the Poor and the Cry of the Earth. We look forward to you continuing to be in contact with us through the electronic newsletter.

Ed O'Connell SSC

Speaking up for 40 Years

Ellen Teague



In one of our first *Vocation for Justice* newsletters in 1986, the South African Dominican theologian Fr Albert Nolan, writing during Apartheid, reflected on 'politicising compassion'. He said, "if our compassion only extends to relieving the symptoms and refuses to tackle the causes because they are political then our compassion is hypocritical." He suggested that, "if we really have compassion we need to learn to speak up."

The Columban Justice, Peace and Ecology mission in Britain has done this. I joined in 1990, when Columbans strengthened engagement with national J&P in England and Wales by including its newsletter in our mailing. Along with Scotland J&P, we shared goals of highlighting structural injustice and supporting formation on Catholic Social Teaching.

That year marked the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Saint Oscar Romero and the Maryknoll martyrs in El Salvador. And shockwaves after the November 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests and two lay women by the Salvadoran military. The newsletter advertised the campaign to close the School of Americas, a US Department of Defence facility which trained officers cited for the murders.

At home, we advertised the report of the first Congress of Black Catholics,

with recommendations prefixed by "Racism exists in the Church today." And Poverty in Britain, after it was the focus of the 1988 national J&P conference in Liverpool, whose recommendations spurred the initiation of the Catholic Social Action Network in 1995. Columban Bobby Gilmore was Chair of the Birmingham Six Campaign, and we encouraged readers to send Christmas cards to the six men wrongly convicted for the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings.

Speaking up led us to close links with Pax Christi and inviting Bruce Kent to write on Peace Spirituality in Summer 1993, flagging up Peace Sunday in 1994. Nine years later a large Columban group cheered him in London's Hyde Park when he addressed the million-strong rally opposing invasion of Iraq.

Centrespreads leading up to the millennium explained the World Bank and IMF. When Pope John Paul called for the cancellation of debt in 'The Coming of the Third Millennium', Ed O'Connell and CAFOD's Brian Davies translated into English and published a simplified version from Peru's Episcopal Commission for Social Action. We supported the 70,000-strong debt lobby of the G8 in Birmingham in 1998 and raised the profile of Jubilee 2000.

Ecological Justice appeared in 1992, when Columban eco-theologian Sean McDonagh wrote about the Rio Earth Summit. The newsletter discussed inter-generational justice and supported national J&P to run conferences on Creation care and theology. We helped get climate change included in the 'Make Poverty History' lobby of 2005 at Scotland's G8 summit. We urged readers and Church leaders to attend The Wave – the UK's biggest ever climate rally in 2009. In 2015, Columbans produced a study programme on *Laudato Si'*.

Columban-lay collaboration has led to our team now being headed by inspiring lay co-worker James Trewby. Columban Fr Frank Nally ran a campaign – advertised in the newsletter – against destructive large-scale mining in the Philippines, flagging up violence of extractive industries towards people and

environment. A special issue on, 'No Patents on life' urged challenging commodification of life and genetic modification of food by corporations. At 30 years, we attended a 'Refugees Welcome' march in London. Refugees and migrants remain a mission priority.

Who would have thought 40 years ago that Churches would celebrate a Season of Creation annually. We nodded approval to hear Pope Leo tell bishops attending the COP30 climate talks last November that, "we are guardians of creation, not rivals for its spoils." The Columban mission priority of protecting Biodiversity means engagement with October's UN Conference on Biological Biodiversity.

For the future? We support Pope Leo's emphasis on Peace. He suggests humanity's future is at risk because of the world's huge number of bloody conflicts and highlights the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

In our tenth anniversary booklet we highlighted implications of the emerging virtual world. The Vatican now urges an evaluation of the opportunities and risks of the digital age, particularly AI. Sean McDonagh's 2021 book on 'Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs' was a prophetic Columban contribution to the debate.

And I would flag up the need for social justice formation. The CAFOD/J&P-led formation process of the pastoral cycle trained me and empowered thousands to life-long involvement in working for justice, peace and ecology. But continuing to grow the J&P movement is getting harder as so few dioceses now have paid J&P workers. J&P is vital, making connections between systemic issues, such as links between climate change, war expenditure and migration.

Vocation for Justice reads the signs of the times and speaks up. This will continue in its new electronic format.

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Pax Christi: 80 Years working for a more Just and Peaceful World

Marie Dennis

The Washington-based Director of the Catholic Institute for Nonviolence reports how the Pax Christi movement has grown into a global community committed to the transforming power of active nonviolence and just peace.

Last November, peacemakers from around the world gathered in Florence, Italy, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Pax Christi International. Conscious that the beloved community of creative, dedicated disciples of the nonviolent Jesus had planted deep roots for our movement at the end of World War II, the gathering reflected on the many ways of 'Building Bridges for a Peaceful Tomorrow' - the conference theme.

As always during Pax Christi events, the richness was in the participants' experiences. We came from Africa, the Americas, Europe, Asia and the Pacific, sharing stories of courageous nonviolent action and the hope it engenders, but also of deep threats and challenges - as in DR Congo, Palestine, United States and beyond.

Prayers each morning - prepared by different regions to reflect their own culture - and the presence during the meeting of Pax Christi's powerful Icon of Reconciliation - reminded us that we are committed to the Gospel values of nonviolence and just peace. We reflected in particular on nonviolence, a thread cutting across all Pax Christi International programmes - as a spirituality, a way of life, a means of fostering peaceful relationships and a powerful approach to violent conflict and social transformation.

We looked with honesty at the state of our world - at fragile democracies and our

wounded Earth, at the dominance of destructive weaponry, including nuclear arms, and the possibility of building just peace together with grassroots social movements practicing active nonviolence. We reviewed our regional work and the working groups that coordinate our international efforts for just peace in the Holy Land, disarmament and integral human security, and climate justice/energy transition from a peacebuilding approach.

One highlight was Pax Christi International's Peace Award Ceremony honouring Bishop Mark Seitz of the Diocese of El Paso in the United States for his courageous witness to Gospel nonviolence and his steadfast defence of migrants and border communities. Honoured too were three organisations working in the same region, advocating for the rights of migrants: Annunciation House, the Hope Border Institute, and the Las Américas Immigrant Advocacy Center.

Those gathered also witnessed the launch of the Pax Christi International Youth Forum. During the conference, young peacebuilders (18-35 years old) reflected on the values they intend to emphasise in their work together for a more just and peaceful world. The gathering said: "Young people are not simply heirs to our mission,

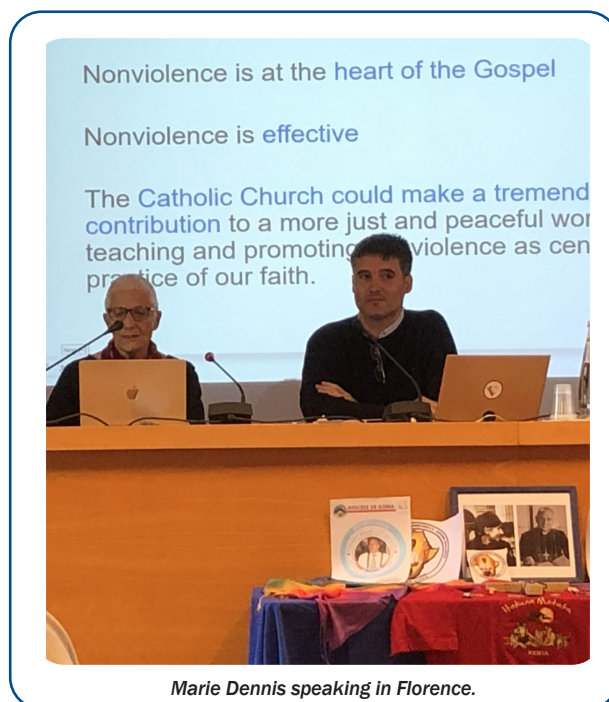
they are co-pilgrims, co-responsible builders of peace today. Through the Pax Christi International Youth Forum, young leaders from across regions will deepen formation, shape our priorities, and amplify our message in schools, universities, faith communities, social and popular movements, international spaces, and other groups. Their moral clarity, spiritual imagination, and commitment to nonviolence give new life and direction to our movement and are essential to building bridges for tomorrow."

Pax Christi International's General Assembly also met during the conference and elected Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo from the Philippines to serve as co-president alongside Sister Teresia Wamuyu Wachira, CJ, who was re-elected as co-president for a third term. Bishop Bagaforo has been President of Caritas Philippines and has a background in social justice and peace, advocating for strong environmental protection, community empowerment, and accountability from both government and mining corporations.

Together, we concluded: "The pontificate of Leo XIV marks a new era and a call to build an 'unarmed and disarming peace.' With humility, courage, and trust in the God of Peace and Nonviolence, we renew

our commitment to be artisans of just peace, stewards of Creation, companions to the vulnerable, and bold witnesses to the nonviolence of Christ. Inspired also by *Dilexi Te*, we affirm that Love is the foundation of Peace, the measure by which our Faith is made credible and our commitment to nonviolence sustained. May we remain faithful to the bridges we are called to build, between communities, nations, peoples, and the wounded Earth we share." (Florence Commitment)

Link: <https://paxchristi.net/> and click on 'Catholic Nonviolence Initiative'



Marie Dennis speaking in Florence.

Belem and Brick Kilns

Amy Woolam Echeverria

The US-based Columban International Coordinator for Justice, Peace and Ecology writes:

As hundreds of international Catholic environmental advocates and faith leaders headed to Belem, Brazil for the annual UN Climate talks (COP30) I headed to Pakistan. It felt a bit counter-intuitive to be headed away from this significant summit as it marked the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement and the release of *Laudato Si'*. A robust faith presence was planned for Belem and Columbans have been engaged in these climate change summits continuously since their origin in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Why would I choose to be anywhere else than Brazil?

Having seen over the decades the slow but steady growth in the Church's taking up of care for the Earth and multilateral government negotiations through the UN, I could see how clear our collective voice has become in calling for key commitments like: a just transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy; finance for mitigation and adaptation to climate catastrophes; and the recognition of environmental debt owed by industrialised nations to nations gripped with financial poverty, climate violence, and migration. The Vatican delegation had a vocal and visible presence in Belem along with Bishops from the Global South, and Catholic institutions and religious orders.

I felt my efforts were better served by going to Pakistan to bear witness to the reality of life there, especially through the lens of the cry of the Earth and the cry of its most vulnerable people.

Pakistan is considered one of the 'hardest' places to be on mission in the Columban world and I anticipated deep economic poverty, fragile yet harsh landscapes, and a kind of pervasive violence that comes with systemic injustice. I did not anticipate the grace and dignity of village women who carried



Visiting the brick kiln

clay water pots on their heads as they floated along the canals, the intricately painted trucks that moved people and goods on roadways pocked with gaping holes, and the warm and curious faces of children who eagerly ran to meet me in the villages to proudly show off their knowledge of English. Celebrating Mass in a village at sunset with goat and sheep milling about or by the light of a single cell phone flashlight under the stars all brought me closer to biblical scenes like the Nativity or the road to Emmaus.

While there, I felt the urgency of COP30. One day we visited a typical brick-making kiln, largely worked by Christian Pakistanis, who are considered unclean and the lowest of the low in society. The work is hard, messy, and exhausting. A typical family of grandparents, parents and children, perhaps 6-7 in total, working eight hours a day combined might make US\$3. This means that children are not in school and that grandparents are working well beyond what their bodies can endure. When heavy rains flood the fields, the kiln is closed because they cannot keep the ovens fired and ground is submerged. As storms and flooding increase due to climate breakdown, families are out of work for longer and forced to go deeper in debt to employers and landowners.

At the brick kiln, I met young girl of about 10 or 12 years old who was sick and unable to work. The family could not send her to the doctor. They could not leave work and had no money to pay for transport, the doctor's visit or medicines. The family asked for a prayer and blessing by the Columban with me.

As we gathered around her, all the biblical stories of unjust landlords and healing the sick took on new depth.

Many such stories are lodged in my heart that keep me and Columbans committed to UN summits on the environment, including climate change, biodiversity, plastics, the ocean, and land degradation. It can feel despairing when governments haggle over the wording of targets and commitments. Or when industries like fossil fuels spend billions on lobbying to ensure their interests are protected.

It is true that reforms are desperately needed at UN summits. It is true that they are never ambitious enough to protect biodiversity and human life. It is true that if we were to disengage from the process than any hope for the family working the brick kiln in Pakistan to rise above their oppression would dissolve.

The environmental advocacy landscape in 2026 includes October's UN Biodiversity Summit (COP17) in Armenia. Countries are expected to update their national plans of action to protect and restore biodiversity. However you engage – may it be with a heart full of hope and peace.

See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-biodiversity-strategy-and-action-plan>

<https://www.cbd.int/https://www.cidse.org/2025/11/21/a-global-synodal-voice-for-ecological-conversion/>

Reflections from the Laudato Si' 10th Anniversary Conference

Adi Mariana Waqa

When the invitation to last October's 'Raising Hope' Conference at Castel Gandolfo, near Rome, came - on the eve of my first anniversary at the Columban Mission Centre in Australia - I knew immediately it was not to be missed. The first reason was that the conference celebrated Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, a document I have worked on with religious educators in Oceania to develop programs for students in primary and secondary schools. The second was that Pope Leo was attending the first day of the event, marking not only the *Laudato Si'* anniversary, but also signalling a new chapter in the Laudato Si' Movement under the new Holy Father.

I travelled to Foculari's Mariapolis Centre in Castel Gandolfo with a Marist Brother from Brazil, Fr João Gutemberg. As we drove toward the Pope's summer residence, overlooking rolling hills and shimmering waters of Lake Albano, Fr João noticed my nervousness and smiled reassuringly, "Do not worry, I will be your guardian this morning!"

The venue was alive with energy. Hundreds of guests arrived from around the world, filling the hall with a joyous mix of languages and laughter. My new "guardian" was right in the centre of it all, greeting friends and colleagues in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Before long, I met the Columban Central Coordinator for Justice, Peace, and Ecology, Amy Echeverria. After many months of online meetings about the Columban mission priority on biodiversity, it was wonderful to finally meet in person.

Amy became another guardian throughout the conference, introducing me to her international network of Church and secular advocates for Care for Our Common Home. Through these conversations, I learned more about the Columbans' deep contribution to *Laudato Si'* - from Fr Seán McDonagh's advisory role during the drafting of the 2015 encyclical to the financial support that helped establish the *Laudato Si'* Movement in its early years. Columbans were part of the original foundational group of 17 organisations and 12 individuals. The key conference organiser, the *Laudato Si'* Movement, has mushroomed over



Adi Mariana Waqa, Ellen Teague, Columban Sr Anne Carbon and Amy Echeverria with melted glacier water blessed by Pope Francis

the last decade.

The encyclical's impact was palpable as more than a thousand guests - religious, lay, and civic - filled the hall. Before the session began, a local *Laudato Si'* Animator confided in me her concern: "When Papa Francis passed away this year, many wondered whether the new Pope would share the same vision and support for the *Laudato Si'* Movement's work." It would soon be answered in Pope Leo's opening address.

Just before he entered, four members of Pacific Artists for Climate Justice performed a moving rendition of *Ave Maria*, followed by an original piece titled *'This Is Our Home.'* Their harmonies brought the voices of Pacific peoples - those living on the frontlines of the climate crisis - to the centre of the global stage:

"Oceans are rising, temperature is high,

Can we find a way to break the ride?

Homes are slowly fading, houses slipping away,

and I can't take it anymore!

But to say, our future is something we gotta do,

For the answer to this equation starts with me and you."

Pope Leo entered to a standing ovation. His presence filled the hall with warmth and hope.

In his speech, Pope Leo affirmed that *Laudato Si'* had, "greatly inspired the Catholic Church and many people of

good will." He described the encyclical as a "gift we have inherited from Pope Francis" and a "source of dialogue" that continues to shape dioceses, religious and academic institutions, business and political circles, and interfaith collaboration worldwide. Yet, he also reminded us that anniversaries of this nature should not be occasions for complacency. "Over the years, we have transitioned from understanding and studying the Encyclical to putting it into practice," he said; "what must be done now to ensure that caring for our common home and listening to the cry of the Earth and the poor do not appear as mere passing trends or, worse still, be seen and felt as divisive issues?"

His Holiness offered his own answer: genuine ecological conversion must begin in the human heart. He called for a shift from data collection to compassion, from analysis to love. An ecological conversion, he said, is inseparable from conversion to God - both having the power to transform the heart toward love of neighbour and care for creation.

Listening to his words, I smiled. God was answering the *Laudato Si'* Animator's concern. Pope Leo not only shares his predecessor's vision but is asking the right questions to carry it forward. Pope Leo offered a clear call to action: "The most effective solutions will not come from individual efforts alone but above all from major political decisions on the national and international levels."

He urged citizens everywhere to hold

Raising Hope Raising Hope Raising Hope



Arnold Schwarzenegger on the platform with Pope Leo, alongside Lorna Gold with Yeb Saño of the *Laudato Si'* Movement.

governments accountable - to demand stronger environmental protections and just economic practices. For me, this was a powerful reminder that the destruction of our common home is not simply a moral issue but a political and structural one. Pope Leo's words truly raised hope - calling people to rise up as part of our Christian responsibility. He said: "We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures. Nor can we call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ without participating in his outlook on creation and his care for all that is fragile and wounded."

Hearing the Pacific song earlier had already taken me back to my island home of Fiji, where several coastal communities have had to relocate due to rising sea levels. Listening to Tuvalu's Minister for Home Affairs, Climate Change, and Environment,

the Honourable Dr Maina Talia, I felt the courage of Pacific peoples who continue to remind the world that while they live at the forefront of the crisis, they will not sink beneath the ocean they love without speaking for justice.

As a Columban co-worker, I am encouraged by the mission priorities of our Society, which continues to practise what it preaches in protecting biodiversity and caring for our common home. Seeing Columban representatives like Amy Echeverria and Ellen Teague, a London-based Columban journalist and campaigner for Justice, Peace, and Ecology, who attended the Paris Climate Conference in 2015, affirmed that I was in good company.

While our clergy may be ageing and the world changing rapidly, I sense God's Spirit of renewal. From

Columban parishes in Fiji to Pakistan, Taiwan to Peru, and the Philippines, the climate crisis is a daily reality for many communities. The work of raising hope must continue, with concerted efforts to weave the words of *Laudato Si'* into the lived realities of the poor and the vulnerable, through faithful stewardship and the protection of God's creation.

Adi Mariana Waqa is the Partnership Coordinator at St Columban's, Essendon, Australia.

Ellen Teague adds:

Pope Leo XIV blessed a chunk of ice 20,000 years old from a melting glacier in Greenland. Sitting beside it, on a stage decorated with living plants and a background view of Earth from space, he said, "the challenges identified in *Laudato Si'* are even more relevant today than they were 10 years ago" and "these challenges are of a social and political nature, but first and foremost of a spiritual nature: they call for conversion." He referred to the apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*, produced by Pope Francis two years ago, which stressed again the urgent call to tackle the climate crisis.

When the 'Raising Hope' conference ended three days later: the blessed water from that piece of Arctic ice was shared among participants as a symbol of hope and commitment. I have some myself! As the block of ice slowly melted, we were reminded of the urgency to act on the climate crisis and our shared responsibility to care for creation. Some of this glacial meltwater was brought to the November 2025 COP30 UN climate conference in Brazil by the *Laudato Si'* Movement and the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil. Also brought were pledges made at 'Raising Hope' by participants. These included promoting the *Laudato Si'* Animators Programme and *Laudato Si'* Action Platform in their countries; supporting the Jubilee Debt Campaign of Caritas Internationalis; and joining international public announcements of divestment from fossil fuels.

Pope Leo's words to the conference have stayed with me:

"God will ask us if we have cultivated and cared for the world that he created, for the benefit of all and for future generations, and if we have taken care of our brothers and sisters. What will be our answer?"



Columban team with speaker Dr Maina Talia, the Climate Minister of Tuvalu in the Pacific

Defending Refugee Rights in UK

Sophie Cartwright

As the UK is set to impose some of Europe's toughest asylum laws, the Senior Policy Officer with Jesuit Refugee Service UK, calls for an asylum system with human dignity and solidarity at its heart.

The Jesuit Refugee Service UK (JRS UK) accompanies, serves and advocates for refugees, and has a special ministry to people made destitute by the asylum process and people in immigration detention.

Refugees rights are under growing threat in the UK, as they are globally. Like its recent predecessors, the government is focusing heavily on securitising borders and punishing refugees for how they travel. Notably, refugees arriving on 'small boats' are being criminalised under legislation passed by the last government, and the new Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill will build on this. But the vast majority of refugees have no choice in how they travel. There are no safe routes for most refugees to come to the UK, and indeed the Refugee Convention allows refugees to travel informally. Securitising borders does not stop desperate people from making dangerous journeys – it just makes those more dangerous still.

Once a refugee has arrived here and claimed asylum, they must navigate the asylum determination process which is complex and hostile. People seeking safe haven are often thrust into it having lost everything, perhaps at the end of dangerous journey. They are in a strange place, not knowing what happens next. Anyone would be disoriented. Many might not speak English, which makes the process more opaque still. Concurrently, a crisis in availability of asylum legal aid means many people seeking asylum are forced to navigate the asylum system without a lawyer, which is close to impossible.

Whilst waiting for a decision on



Sophie Cartwright

their claim, asylum seekers are not allowed to work and cannot access public funds, so they must rely on asylum support to survive. They receive a very small amount of money, and accommodation that is routinely run down and very often unsafe. Many asylum seekers are now housed in hotels where conditions are very poor. The previous government had begun to warehouse people seeking asylum in former military sites, including Napier barracks in Kent and Wethersfield in Essex.

JRS UK used to run outreach to Napier barracks, and I have been there many times. The site is bleak and prison-like.

Furthermore, JRS UK's research showed that the setting was detrimental to mental health - being there subjected refugees to re-trauma, and sleep deprivation was prolific. It also militated against integration and participation in community, cutting refugees off from the wider community and making them feel othered. Troublingly, the current government has now renewed plans to expand this kind of accommodation. Not only is this cruel: it is destructive and serves no good purpose. People seeking asylum should be housed in local communities. Having been through the asylum system, many people are wrongly refused asylum. JRS UK works with people who have been refused asylum, and many are ultimately recognised as refugees after years following submission

of fresh asylum claims. But in the meantime, they have been made destitute, as asylum support is cut off following refusal.

Furthermore, the government is determined to increase forcible removals, placing refugees wrongly refused asylum at risk of being returned to danger. A focus on removals often means removals at any cost, without thought for the human consequences. JRS UK's detention outreach team, which provides support to people detained at the centres at Heathrow airport, encounter people facing rapid removals without due process, including many people detained under the 'one-in-one-out' deal with France. Accessing legal representation is in many ways even more difficult in detention than in the community, as highlighted in recent research by JRS UK: lawyers contracted to provide legal advice and representation to people in detention frequently don't have capacity to take on cases, and many lack relevant expertise.

In the UK, immigration detention entails incarceration in prison-like conditions, without time limit, and the decision to detain does not go before a judge. Detention is deeply traumatic and does long-term damage to mental health. I have spoken to torture survivors who have been held in immigration detention in the UK. Repeatedly, they have told me that being in detention is like a second torture. JRS UK thus calls for an end to immigration detention. The use of detention is not proportionate to the aim of immigration control, and case management can be done much better, with more justice and dignity, in community settings.

This picture is bleak, but there is hope. JRS UK's work focuses on defending the right to asylum and access to justice for refugees and shining a light on situations where that is not happening, and this is something we carry forward into 2026.

Link: <https://www.jrsuk.net/>

Schools: Act, Inspire, Create Change

James Trewby

My 'vocation story' and 'ecological conversion' are deeply linked to the Philippines. From visiting as a young person, living and volunteering there as a young adult, and now to many connections through my work, it has been the place that has helped me hear 'the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor'. It is also a place of friendships, beauty, music and games of basketball!

As I write, the Philippines is once again on my mind. Why? It is on the frontline of the climate crisis, with two typhoons hitting in a week – hundreds dead and millions displaced. On the island of Cebu, Archbishop Alberto Sy Uy hoped the “unprecedented” floods, “awaken in us a greater ecological and moral conversion and remind us that caring for our common home is an act of faith, justice, and love.”

Training for teachers in Britain

One of the most satisfying parts of my work is providing formation for educators. We offer training, seminars and ecoretreats for teachers, chaplains, youth workers and school senior leaders. As I write, I am particularly busy running sessions for teachers of two Multi Academy Trusts – about 800 teachers in total. Working with this year's Columban Faith in Action Volunteer Becca Long, Tim Mulroy SSC and a team of young people from secondary schools, we have created a game show bringing together elements of scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, nature connection and learning about the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises. Highlights include teachers rewriting selected extracts from *Laudato Si'* in rhyme, making scripture-inspired nature collages, identifying birdsong and a conker tournament. The first session went well – with one head teacher suggesting we explore getting it commissioned on Channel 4!

In one school we had sessions for the teachers led by some of the 6th form students who joined our Columban/Faithful



Companions of Jesus group at the April 2025 Climate Coalition lobby of Parliament. It's great to see the young people sharing their experience.

But going back to the Philippines? During a day with 400 teachers in Coventry we linked live with the Philippine Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos on Negros Island. Bishop Gerry has led efforts to stop the construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure threatening the Verde Island Passage, a place of incredible beauty and biodiversity, upon which fisherfolk and farmers depend for their livelihoods. His efforts align with strong leadership by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, which has divested from fossil fuels. It was so impactful for people here to have the opportunity to hear first-hand from a faith-inspired activist on the front line of the climate and biodiversity crises – it makes it all real.

Solidarity – education and action

Columbans are linking 26 UK primary schools with a tree growing project led by the Columbans and the Higaonon indigenous group in Mindanao, southern Philippines. Each half term we provide resources to the schools helping them to learn, reflect and take action. Topics covered include the Season of Creation, biodiversity in the Philippines, the impact of climate change and learning prayers in the local language. Given COP30, the most recent resource invited schools, teachers and governors

to consider taking the CAFOD campaign action, writing to the Energy Secretary, Ed Miliband, to call for urgent action, referencing their links with the Philippines. Marjorie Engcoy, the Columban Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Animator in Mindanao, writes:

As we work together in shaping our future, we stand at yet another crucial moment in history. The challenges brought by the climate crisis are real and pressing - stronger storms, rising temperatures, loss of forests and biodiversity affect all of us, especially Indigenous communities and those whose lives are closely tied to the land. However, in the face of these crisis, we also hold something very powerful - our ability to act, to inspire, and to create change. Your participation in the Columban-Higaonon Tree Growing Project is more than an activity - it is a commitment to life, culture, and creation. Every seed we plant roots us in the wisdom of our Higaonon partners who teach us to care for the land not as property, but as home. Every sapling we nurture symbolises our belief that the planet can heal if we choose to heal it.

Your Partners in the Columban-Higaonon Tree Growing Project

<https://columbans.co.uk/justice-peace/13642/higaonon-solidarity-growing-global-stewards-together/>

James Trewby at: education@columbans.co.uk

Home Office Vigil for Refugees

15 December saw the final vigil of 2025 outside the Home Office in Central London to pray for refugees. Columban JPE was there. Around 30-40 Christians have gathered monthly for the ecumenical vigil – now in its fifth year – for those who lose their lives trying to reach a place of safety in Europe. It will continue in 2026 on the third Monday of the month at 12.30pm.

Columban migrant ministry - US/Mexico border

The Columban Border Ministry Team at the US/Mexico border – now in its 29th year and based at the Columban Mission Centre in El Paso – says: “We feel blessed to continue offering a welcoming embrace and a prophetic voice. There is a continued focus on Catholic Social Teaching and on youth and adolescents. They say: “We recognise the call to move, now, beyond a devotional Catholicism geared to meet our personal comfort and well-being and into an active faith that builds community and does justice with a goal of constructing a new world in the spirit of the Kingdom of God, embracing the poor.”

Pope Leo supports US Bishops' stance on Immigrants

On 13 November, the US bishops issued a pastoral letter rejecting mass expulsions, expressing concern for the situation in the country, and reaffirming that national security and the protection of human dignity are not incompatible.” On 18 November Pope Leo supported the bishops' statement. He said: “I believe we must seek ways of treating people with humanity, with the dignity that is theirs. If someone is in the United States illegally, there are ways to address this. There are courts. There is a judicial system.”

A Rocha Retreat: Confronting ecological challenges

Columban Father Tim Mulroy attended the annual A Rocha UK retreat in Northampton last November. A Rocha UK equips Christian churches of all denominations to protect and restore the environment. Fr Tim said: “The retreat emphasised that, while the ecological challenges facing our world are enormous, our Christian faith enables us to continue to confront them with conviction and hope.”

<https://arocha.org.uk/>

More faith institutions announce fossil fuel divestment

On 18 November 2025, to coincide with COP30, 62 faith institutions announced their divestment from fossil fuel companies, stressing the urgent need for fossil fuel phase out, given the harmful climate, biodiversity and human rights impacts of extracting, transporting and burning fossil fuels. The list included five Catholic dioceses (four in Italy and one in Canada) and Catholic religious orders in France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, UK and the US. More than 600 faith institutions have supported calls for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

NJPN in 2026: Share the Light

The National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) will host two in-person gatherings: Sheffield in April and London in September, with opportunities for shared prayer, dialogue, learning and discernment. ‘Food’ will be the theme of the Sheffield meeting. The Annual July 2026 Conference, “Just Talk,” offers a chance to listen, celebrate, and challenge across the network. The Southern Dioceses Environment Group and the Northern Dioceses Environment Group meet regularly, and so too does the NJPN Environment Working Group. See: www.justice-and-peace.org.uk

Prime Minister urged to halt nuclear expansion

Pax Christi England and Wales joined faith groups, MPs, and Trade Union leaders at Downing Street on 17 November to urge the Prime Minister to reverse the decision to purchase US nuclear-capable fighter jets. They said the purchase breaches international law and heightens nuclear risks. Pax Christi England and Wales said: “At a time when we’re seeing global suffering due to war and climate breakdown, we’re calling on the government to put peace, not militarism, at the heart of its defence and foreign policymaking.” A letter handed in included signatories: Pax Christi England and Wales, CND, Campaign against the Arms Trade, Movement for the Abolition of War, Muslim Association of Britain, and United Nations Association.

Conference: ‘Social Justice and Catholic Education’

A conference marking the 60th anniversary of the key Vatican II document ‘Gaudium et Spes’ was held at St Mary’s University, Twickenham, in December. ‘Gaudium et Spes’ – ‘Joys and Hopes’ – was the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World. Speaker Gemma Simmonds CJ said, “the opening sentences of Gaudium et Spes were heard in their time as a clarion call for Catholics to become involved in the social challenges of their age as an integral part of their faith and, 60 years on, this has become a normative aspect of Christian catechesis and practice in most British Catholic schools.” But she expressed concern that, “a new generation of Catholics, tied up in contemporary ideological conflicts, seems more concerned about doctrinal orthodoxy than with the practical implications of a Council still in the process of implementation.”

FCJ Centre for Spirituality and EcoJustice

The Centre at Euston in London – a ministry of the Faithful Companions of Jesus – offers in person and online events on Justice, Peace and Ecology. <https://www.facebook.com/FCJSpiritualityCentreLondon>
<https://www.fcjsisters.org/who-we-are/our-mission/care-for-our-common-home/>

Green Christian

Green Christian is pushing for progression of the Climate and Nature Bill. MPs are being urged to sign Early Day Motion 1184. The Bill would reaffirm the UK government’s obligations to limit global warming to 1.5 °C under the Paris Agreement and to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030 under the Global Biodiversity Framework. <https://action.zerohour.uk/write/>
And see: <https://greenchristian.org.uk/introduction/resources/green-christian/>

‘Ears to Hear, Listening to Minorities’

Ellen Teague is running a seminar ‘Listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor’ at January’s Christians Aware Annual ecumenical conference in Northampton. <https://christiansaware.org.uk/annual-conference>

SCHOOLS MEDIA COMPETITION 2026

The Columbans are looking for students in Britain and Ireland (aged 13-18 inclusive, parental permission required) to submit an original piece of writing or an original image on the theme:

"BECOMING A REFUGEE IS NEVER A CHOICE, BUT HOW WE RESPOND IS."

(UN Secretary-General António Guterres)

COMPETITION LAUNCH:
21ST SEPTEMBER 2025 - WORLD PEACE DAY
DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES: 14TH FEBRUARY 2026
WINNERS ANNOUNCED: 9TH MARCH 2026

More details: www.columbancompetition.com



Catholic Social Teaching calls us to 'welcome the stranger'. We invite young people to explore perceptions of people seeking sanctuary, considering practical examples of welcome and solidarity.

PRINT PRIZES
1ST £300
2ND £150 • 3RD £100

IMAGE PRIZES
1ST £300
2ND £150 • 3RD £100



COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES
BRITAIN

COLUMBAN SCHOOLS COMPETITION 2026 - WELCOMING REFUGEES

Columban Missionaries in Britain are inviting students aged 13–18 to enter the 2026 Schools Media Competition. The theme is: "Becoming a refugee is never a choice. But how we respond is." – *United Nations Secretary General Secretary, António Guterres.*

Columbans have a mission priority of supporting Migrants and Refugees. This echoes Catholic Social Teaching which calls us to 'welcome the stranger'. Pope Leo told diplomats in May 2025: "My own story is that of a citizen, the descendant of immigrants, who in turn chose to emigrate... All of us, in the course of our lives, can find ourselves healthy or sick, employed or unemployed, living in our native land or in a foreign country, yet our dignity always remains unchanged."

The Columbans invite students in Britain (aged 13-18 inclusive, parental permission required) to submit an original piece of writing or an original image on the theme.

The competition aims to increase young people's compassion and understanding of journeys of displaced

people seeking safety in another country. How can we respect diversity and respond with love to those seeking refuge and safety? Can we be inspired by real-life stories of resilience and hope, Scripture, or Catholic Social Teaching? What practical projects do churches in UK run to support refugees? How can we empathise with the experience of individuals and families being separated from the place they call home?

The competition closes on 14 February 2026 and competition winners will be announced on the 9 March. Cash prizes will be awarded to the winners and the first prize is an impressive £300!

Columban Competition website for information and entry details: <https://www.columbancompetition.com/>

PEACE SUNDAY – 18 January 2026

"Peace be with you all: Towards an 'Unarmed and Disarming' Peace

Pope Leo has announced the theme – 'Peace be with you all: Towards an 'unarmed and disarming peace' – and Pax Christi offers liturgy and prayer resources to help you mark the day and reflect on this vital theme in your parish or group. Pope Leo has continued the

exhortation of Pope Francis that the call to live nonviolent "disarmed" lives is core to Catholic Social Teaching and the key to peace in a world scarred by violence.

The following resources are downloadable from the Pax Christi England and Wales website at <https://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2026/> Or email info@paxchristi.org.uk or phone 0208 203 4884.

- Liturgy Booklet with an introduction to the liturgy and readings for Peace Sunday, homily notes and bidding prayers.
- A special Peace Sunday related edition of the 'Justpeace' Newsletter.
- Pax Christi President Bishop John Arnold's Peace Sunday letter to parishes
- Peace Sunday 2026 Prayer Card and Poster
- Peace Sunday Activities and Prayers for Children



RESOURCES

Apostolic Exhortation: Dilexi te

Pope Leo XIV's first Apostolic Exhortation sees the love of Christ incarnated in love for the poor, in caring for the sick, opposing slavery, defending women who experience exclusion and violence, making education available to all, accompanying migrants, working for equality and more.

<https://cafod.org.uk/pray/dilexi-te-explained>

Called to be Peacemakers: A Catholic approach to arms control and disarmament CBCEW



This downloadable document from the International Affairs department of the Catholic bishops of England and Wales argues that if Catholics are to stand as peacemakers in our troubled world, an integral part of this mission involves working to limit the proliferation of weapons and to advance the cause of global disarmament. It calls for nuclear disarmament and a moratorium on lethal autonomous weapons.

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/called-to-be-peacemakers/>

Love the Stranger Youth version CBCEW

'Love the Stranger' was published in 2023 by the Catholic bishops of England and Wales, presenting a Catholic response to refugees and migrants. The Caritas Social Action Network and Caritas Brentwood have collaborated to produce this youth-focused version. It is an important resource of formation in social teaching as young people seek to make sense of the contemporary world and understand how faith helps us to respond.

<https://www.csan.org.uk/news/launch-of-love-the-stranger-youth-version/>

'Render unto Caesar' CBCEW

A publication of the Department on Social Justice on taxation and Catholic Social Teaching. Authors Prof. Anna Rowlands, Ruth Kelly and Prof. Philip Booth. Decisions on taxation and government spending need to be driven by human dignity and serving the common good.

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/render-unto-caesar/>

Global Debt: Spoof Pay-Day Loan Ad CAFOD

A new video about the global debt crisis which was screened to MPs in parliament last November. CAFOD calls on the UK government to pass a new Debt Justice Law to force private lenders to cancel debt. UK law governs 90% of countries covered by the G20 debt relief scheme and 50% of all international debt. In the film CAFOD Ambassador, actor Alex MacQueen, plays a fictional and predatory 'dodgy lender' - representing the private banks and hedge funds that are allowed to target vulnerable low-income countries with loans, at exorbitant interest rates.

<https://globalgoals.org/unfair-loans/>

Rooted in Hope: A Christians Aware Resource towards building biodiversity

The main section is 'Stories of Hope' where good things are happening to reverse the decline of species and to build biodiversity. Ellen Teague contributed a chapter on 'Eco-systems.' David Attenborough has said: "It is the whole range of biodiversity that we must care for – the whole thing, rather than one or two stars."

£15.00 + £2.00 p&p from <https://christiansaware.org.uk/books>

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how-you-can-
help/subscribe/
enewsletter/](https://columbans.co.uk/how-you-can-help/subscribe/enewsletter/)***



Conflict & Climate Change Movement for Abolition of War

An 18-min DVD - which Columban JPE helped produce - calls for an understanding of security which includes good stewardship of the natural world for the common good. £8.99 (DVD and Resource Booklet) www.kevinmayhew.com/conflict-and-climate-change-bookand-dvd.html or 0845 388 1634.

E-NEWSLETTER:

Sign up to our free e-newsletter. Receive updates, news, stories and reflections by Columban Missionaries direct to your email, including a special focus on a Justice, Peace or Ecology (JPE) theme six times a year.

Scan the QR code or visit:

www.columbans.co.uk/enewsletter



VOCATION FOR JUSTICE

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