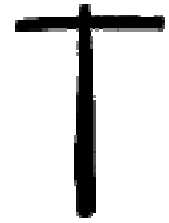


Franciscan PRAYER and PRAXIS

Justice Peace and Creation Network News



Issue 13 - July 2009

As members of the Society of St. Francis of the European Province, we are inspired by St Francis and St Clare to *compassionate action* grounded in *contemplative prayer*.

Contributions to this Newsletter come from First and Third Order members of the Society of St. Francis

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FRANCISCANS INTERNATIONAL report by
a new member of the Board - Averil Swanton

It was with some surprise last October that I received a request from our then Minister Provincial, Dick Bird, to allow my name to go forward as a candidate for membership of the Board of Directors for Franciscans International. I had been able to visit the Geneva Office of FI in March 2007 and did therefore have some idea of the work that they are doing. So, having given the request some thought and prayer, I agreed to let my name and CV go forward. For months nothing seemed to happen and then in January I received a letter from Rome, from the Conference of the Franciscan Family to say that I had been appointed. This was closely followed by e-mails of congratulations from all over the world, both from our own Tertiaries and First Order and from various Roman Catholic Franciscans. I was deeply touched by the excitement and pleasure that my appointment seemed to evoke and I was very mindful of the privilege of being the first Anglican member of the Board, and a lay, secular woman to boot!

My first Board meeting took place in Geneva at the end of March and I was welcomed with great warmth and much talk of 'making history'. The days were long, starting with worship and sharing our faith stories at 8.30 and going on until 7.00 or 8.00 at night. The first day was given over to induction for the new members – seven of us in all – with three members of the old Board together with the three members continuing in office. We were given a brief history of Franciscans International; its relationship with the United Nations; its structure and the increased responsibility of the Conference of the Franciscan Family (the Heads of the Orders of Friars Minor, OFM Conventuals, OFM Capucins, Third Order Regulars and Seculars and one Sister to represent all the Franciscan Womens' Orders.) This latter issue was given great emphasis since it is now agreed that this body has taken on board that the work for justice, peace and the environment is an essential part of the Franciscan charism and not just

an optional extra, which requires more than just its blessing, but rather a whole-hearted commitment to further the aims and work of FI.

We were then given a briefing on the roles and responsibilities of the Board. I have certainly never been a part of so international a body. There are members from Singapore, Germany, Colombia, Mexico, Mauritius, Canada, North America, Ireland and the UK, covering all the main Franciscan Orders, including the Seculars and now SSF. We were introduced to the heads of departments from the Geneva office and informed about the work of the New York and Bangkok offices. Since the purpose of FI is to work with the United Nations, their offices are located in the places where the UN works. I had had the privilege on my last visit of attending the meetings of the Council of Human Rights and had seen for myself how FI works with lobbying the diplomats, arranging fringe meetings as well as bringing forward human rights issues from its vast experience at grassroots level. This kind of work does not have the immediate appeal of famine relief or frontline medical care; it takes immense patience to change the minds of governments, but the effects of tackling the abuse of human rights can be lifesaving in the literal sense and also in the vast improvement of living conditions. The enormous advantage that FI has is that it has Brothers and Sisters working all over the world, with the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised people, just as Francis himself did in Assisi.

FI was established in 1984 and for a quarter of a century has brought forward to the UN concerns from the grassroots. For example Franciscan White Cross Friars welcome and work with the millions of migrants who make the perilous boat journey from the Magreb to Spain in a way that affirms their human dignity. In many countries Franciscan Friars and Sisters work with the indigenous peoples whose basic human rights have been eroded and denied. They are also able to alert the UN and the world in general of the plight of civilians in areas of conflict. Others focus on the right for education and health care for those who have no voice of their own to ask. They speak up too for those who are arrested, tortured and killed for their beliefs. It is true that there are other organisations doing similar things, but the great advantage for FI is that there are Franciscans actually living and working in these places and they therefore speak with authority.

Another and vital part of their work is to provide training so that people can express their needs to those in authority and FI can and does bring people over to address the UN on specific issues. One recent achievement was to draw to the attention of the UN in Geneva the grave issue of the infanticide of so-called 'child witches' in northern Benin. Other training is provided to help people transform their own societies and standards of living. Problems can be shared and solutions found together.

For me the two and a half days were life-affirming, with a lot of laughter and a deep level of sharing of our faith. At times I think that we as Tertiaries, and probably the Roman Seculars too, take ourselves too seriously; it was the Friars and Sisters who had us roaring with laughter and I was reminded of a meeting of **our** Provincial Chapter when the then Abbess of the Second Order, when asked what she thought of our meeting, asked us why we didn't laugh more. Yes FI and Franciscans in general are dealing with matters of serious and vital importance, but we lose something fundamental to our calling if we cannot laugh or share our joy.

I would value the prayers of Chapter as I explore what I can bring to the Board which is particular to SSF, being mindful that I represent not only worldwide Tertiaries but the First and Second Orders too. I am delighted that a coming issue of Franciscan magazine is to be devoted to the work of FI. I would be happy to follow that up with talks or further reports if required.

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"Speaking Truth to Power" JPIC Links Conference 15-17 May 2009- report by Jenny Tee CSF

This was the theme of this year's Conference of Religious' JPIC Links weekend, and we had three remarkable people inspire us with their perspectives on this issue. Peter Barnett (Pilsdon at West Malling) spoke of the Pilsdon communities and their radical hospitality, before moving on to examples of 'speaking to power'. These were "mostly in the particulars", such as challenging changes in housing benefit and gaining acceptance in legislation for 'intentional communities'. He stressed the importance of both working with and challenging the language used in meetings, and of knowing where the power lies in a place or situation; he has long been active in 'Community / Citizens Organising'. One of his questions for discussion: how could we 'do Pilsdon' in the city, especially as working with the land/produce/animals is central to the life?

Martin Newell (Catholic Worker Community, London) outlined the roles of Catholic Worker Communities in works of mercy, as houses of hospitality and as bases from which to organise. The community in London shares its house with destitute asylum seekers, and has a cafe and an 'Open Table' soup kitchen; it also organises non-violent action on justice issues. Martin spoke about the local

context, in Dalston and in London (close to the power of government and commercial head offices) and the wider context of our privileges and riches. Amongst his examples, he spoke of police reaction to praying a Litany of Resistance in a park alongside the recent G20 Meeting, and also of times he's been in prison and his experience of reading the gospels there 'from the margins'. He challenged us to work out our discipleship in our wider context: 'how can we be faithful at the heart of the 'empire', what could a British, European, First World liberation theology look like?'

It seems that Pilsdon and the Catholic Worker House have much in common, in terms of hospitality, a prophetic dimension to their life and practical active challenge. All three speakers drew explicitly on Jesus' practice.

Robert Kaggwa (Missionary of Africa from Uganda, theologian & RC Chaplain at Roehampton University) spoke about justice in the church, which he believes is just as important as in other areas; we should not be afraid to be self-critical. The church is marginalised in society and, at its most institutional, can be hierarchical and not demonstrating justice, inclusion and empowerment. Some of the church statements and practices he quoted brought strong responses from the group! He found that Religious tend to be more democratic than the church (RC?) as a whole, and found encouragement in his own order being multi-national/racial.

We were about 35 delegates, many of whom have been justice and peace activists for many years. There were few men, and the only Anglicans this year were Franciscans: Hugh SSF, Jenny Tee CSF, Nancy Adams, Pauline Thomas, and Denise Yeldham from the TSSF. This was the first year that a general invitation went out to Tertiaries and Associates, a good development that will probably grow. As the Justice and Peace Link for TSSF, Nancy keeps news flowing via e-mail and the jpc-sec.org.uk website, a link to which is on Franciscans.org.uk

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Richard Rohr OFM (Centre for Action and Contemplation, New Mexico) is coming to the UK in 2010

Fr. Richard has become a well-known speaker in the UK and across the world on issues such as: scripture as liberation; religion and spirituality; the integration of action and contemplation; community building; male spirituality; the Enneagram; the power of paradox; the emerging church; and eco-spirituality.

The TSSF Study and Prayer Steering Group is organizing a two day event 3rd-4th Sept. 2010 in association with St. James Church, Piccadilly. Further details to follow in the Winter Chronicle 2009. For more information on Fr Richard visit the CAC website: www.cacradicalgrace.org

What is happening in the Devon Area? by Steve Jones, North Devon local group

The answer is everything. Before I became a tertiary the Devon Area, the group had decided that as a group they would not be effective in taking on the multiple issues of Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation, which abound throughout their neighbourhoods and the wide world. However, as individuals they could attach greater importance to personal and Holy Spirit guided issues. They could focus specific prayers aimed at victims, perpetrators and situations that were laid on their heart. These are some of the issues where individuals and local groups have become involved.

- Christian Aid and social justice at home and abroad. We must not forget to see all those JPIC issues that are rife in our localities;
- World Development Movement;
- Fairtrade within local shops, cafes and councils, which has led to towns becoming recognised Fair Trade towns in Devon;
- USPG -with its emphasis on the whole Gospel and implications on development;
- small but worthwhile contributions to The New Internationalist and Amnesty;
- Involvement with green energy use etc;
- Prison Chaplaincies, that have seen the rehabilitation of offenders carried on after prison and into societal living.

On a personal note and how I came to compile this article was through my latest outreach. This happened by walking through doors that opened for me, in an area that I never thought I would go. I needed something to occupy me in the capacity of occupational therapy so I enrolled on an art course. For one of the assignments (Fire & Fury), we were to illustrate an issue that we felt passionate about and which raised the temperature of our feelings. While researching the many issues around the world, particularly the problems in the Middle East I felt pulled towards the quiet ethnic cleansing by stealth of a people's source of livelihood. I refer to the gradual destruction of the olive groves in Gaza by Israel: a systematic process of maintaining a people in poverty by destroying their primary means of national production. Therefore, I came to paint a picture illustrating this deeply felt issue.



The picture shows what I believe to be several important factors that give the illustration its title 'The OLIVE GRAVE':

- The red /orange line at opposing top left and bottom right corners signifies the bulldozers that rip up the olive trees.
- TOP - the Israeli military overseeing it all; Palestinians harvesting the olives; and angels taking the murdered innocents heavenward
- CENTRE - Palestinians and Jews for Peace, replanting olive tree saplings; and a Palestinian woman and child looking on wondering what the future holds.
- BOTTOM - Palestinian woman in distress as a bulldozer rips up her family's olive grove; a very brave Palestinian woman called Yasmin that chained herself to an olive tree in defiance of the desecration taking place.

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UN and Ecumenical Days / Weeks

JULY

11th World Population Day - www.unfpa.org/wpd

12th Sea Sunday. The Mission to Seafarers at www.missiontoseafarers.org

AUGUST

12th International Youth Day www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/iyouthday.htm

SEPTEMBER

21st International Day of Peace www.internationaldayofpeace.org

OCTOBER

16th World Food Day – www.fao.org

18th – 25th One World Week www.oneworldweek.org

20th – 27th Week of Prayer for World Peace

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Events and Campaigns on the TSSF JPIC Website: www.jpc-sec.org.uk

If there are JPIC events in your area that you would like to have posted on the 'Events' page of the JPIC website so that others may be made aware of them, contact the Editor at the address below.

Newsletter Contributions: Please send your contributions for the next edition of the JPIC Newsletter by the 31st of October 2009 to: Nancy Adams, Newbigging Farm, Broxburn, EH52 6PN or nancy@newbigging.org