



**St James & St William of York
Catholic Church Reading
Social Justice Group**

Notes of Meeting held at the Chaplaincy Upper Redlands Rd 10 Feb 2010

Present: Father John, Javier Alfonso, Carlos Busamante, Mary Butler, Nora Fleming, Phillipa Hardman, Graham Johnson, Paul McGrory, Michael Scanlon
Apologies: Kevin Boyle

1. **The meeting began** with a short prayer, and we welcomed Father John and two parishioners from Venezuela who were with us for the first time. We introduced ourselves around the room and gave a brief summary of the aims of the Social Justice Group, which was established in the Parish as a response to the publication of *The Common Good* by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in 1996 as an explanation of the Church's social teaching. This is still available as a pdf from www.catholic-ew.org.uk, by following links to publications.

2. **We reviewed our recent activities**, including the visit of Sister Ann Teresa of the Medaille Trust, working with victims of people- trafficking and sexual abuse, and the greetings cards sent each year around Christmas & New Year to prisoners of conscience in several of countries identified by the campaigning organisation Action by Christians against Torture.

3. **Fairtrade Fortnight 22 Feb – 4 March:** As a Fairtrade Parish it is important that we keep reinforcing the message that goods which are produced and traded fairly are increasingly available to buy locally. Phillipa brought details of this year's theme, *The Big Swap*, which encourages people to pledge to change one conventional commercial item (or more) which they buy regularly to a Fairtrade equivalent. A sign-up sheet will be produced for distribution after all Masses on 27 / 28 Feb, and SJ Group members will have an opportunity to speak about this (v briefly) at the time the Notices are read. Carlos volunteered to speak at 11am. Michael suggested it may also be possible to obtain samples of tea bags or coffee to hand out. Phillipa will draft the form and publicise it in the newsletter the week before and she and Michael will liaise on the detailed arrangements. **PH, MS, CB**

4. **Mass for Archbishop Oscar Romero Wed 24 March:** On the suggestion of CAFOD, Kevin is taking the lead in arranging an evening to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the assassination of Oscar Romero, centred around a mass which Fr John has agreed to celebrate at St James. After mass in the side chapel SJ Group members will provide refreshments and it is hoped to mount a presentation using the laptop projector and screen. Fr John will ask Jackie to extend the invitation to the other Catholic churches in the area. The University congregation will be notified via Sabine and the local Latin American Association via Carlos. A write-up of the event could be offered to Portsmouth People. Kevin will be asked to liaise with Fr John over the format for the mass, readings, music etc. Paul may be able to persuade some of his 6pm mass contacts to help with the music. **KB, PMcG**

5. **Lent:**

a) **Evening meeting:** It was agreed that our meeting in March would take the form of reflections discussion and prayers on passages from scripture taken from this years' CAFOD/ Christian Aid Lent book "the Favourable Time". This will be in the side chapel or the BDB room according to the numbers attending. Graham will arrange a date which does not clash with other Parish activities and will take the lead in organising and publicising the event. **GJ**

b) Count Your Blessings: Phillipa handed out a single-sheet calendar published by Christian Aid which can be used every day during Lent to focus fasting, thoughts and prayers on poverty in many forms throughout the world in contrast to our own relative good fortune, and to prompt alms-giving. Fr John suggested that this should be used throughout the Parish, and Phillipa will liaise with Jackie on obtaining and distributing them and publicising this appropriately. **PH**

c) Lenten Fast day Friday 26 Feb: SJ Group members will help in the handing out of CAFOD envelopes at masses on the previous weekend 20/21 Feb. The Parish CAFOD rep Kevin will be asked to identify volunteers at each mass. **KB**

6. Haiti earthquake: Parishioners have been considering what further steps should be taken following the very generous response to the retiring collection (over £2,500) two weeks ago. Several SJ Group members had signed an on-line petition urging debt relief for Haiti in the aftermath of the 12 January earthquake. On 7 February it was announced that the G7 Group of the world's richest nations, which includes the UK, have agreed to cancel Haiti's bi-lateral debts. In all, a total of £800m of debt to countries and lending institutions has already been cancelled. There was doubt as to whether a parish twinning would be practicable, but there is clearly a desire to do more to help.

Mary spoke of emergency boxes containing tents, blankets, tools, cooking equipment, children's toys etc being organised for Haiti by the international disaster relief charity Shelterbox (details in the annex to these notes) Fr John asked Mary to discuss with him separately how the Parish might be invited to support this very practical initiative as a sort of interim Parish Project. **MB**

7. Forthcoming General Election: It was agreed that the appropriate way in which to invite parishioners to engage with the issues (and to encourage them to exercise their vote) would be to publicise the local public meetings with the candidates which are usually organised by Churches Together.

8. Medaille Trust: Fr John agreed to Nora's suggestion that Sister Ann Teresa should be invited to address the Parish as a whole and to make an appeal after weekend masses some time in the Autumn. **NF**

9. Prayers: The meeting closed with prayers on matters of current concern, which will be forwarded by Phillipa to the Parish Office as potential contributions to the bidding prayers at a future mass. **PH**

10. Next meetings: March date to be decided (see item 5a) and 14 April

ShelterBox emergency boxes: details from the website

<http://www.shelterbox.org>

Shelter

At the heart of every ShelterBox is a ten-person tent. It is custom made for ShelterBox by Vango, one of the world's leading tent manufacturers, and is designed to withstand extreme temperatures, high winds and heavy rainfall. Internally, each tent has privacy partitions that allow recipients to divide the space as they see fit.

A smile

Every box contains a children's pack containing drawing books, crayons and pens. For children who have lost most, if not all, their possessions, these small gifts are treasured.

Warmth and protection

In addition to the tent, the boxes contain a range of other survival equipment including thermal blankets and insulated ground sheets, essential in areas where temperatures plummet at nightfall. Where malaria is prevalent mosquito nets are supplied, as well a life saving means of water purification. Water supplies often become contaminated after a major disaster, as infrastructure and sanitation systems are destroyed, this presents a secondary but no less dangerous threat to survivors than the initial disaster itself.

Self sufficiency

A basic tool kit containing a hammer, axe, saw, trenching shovel, hoe head, pliers and wire cutters can be found in every box. These items enable people to improve their immediate environment, by chopping firewood or digging a latrine, for example. Then, when it is possible, to start repairing or rebuilding the home they were forced to leave.

Fit for purpose

Every item is durable, practical and brand new. The box itself is lightweight and waterproof and has been used for a variety of purposes in the past - from water and food storage containers to a cot for a newly born baby.

A heart to the home

A key piece in every box is either a wood burning or multi-fuel stove - that can burn anything from diesel to old paint. This provides the heart of the new home where water is boiled, food is cooked and families congregate. In addition, there are pans, utensils, bowls, mugs and water storage containers.