



# SOCIAL ACTION COMMISSION

## Annual Report - 2023



### **A Message from the Commission Chair, Ashley Ralston:**

What a year 2022 proved to be!

The COVID crisis seemed to be reducing, COP-26 agreed to a 'loss damage' initiative for poorer countries, and papal Synod groups were active in parishes. However, global energy prices also increased substantially with a cost-of-living crisis. 'Warm hubs' were opened across the UK with many food banks overwhelmed - we, as a nation are certainly feeling the effects.

As Justice & Peace stalwarts, we expect things to happen and sure enough we have the Ukraine/Russia conflict - a catastrophe still being played out. Internal and external conflicts increase refugee numbers with climate change - which causes floods, drought and extreme weather conditions - contributing to hunger and displacement, ensuring that no country is unaffected.

These issues are just some of the scenarios our working parties are encountering, their efforts working behind the scenes and at the 'front' is truly commendable, my grateful thanks to them.

Please do read their reports, they offer a snapshot of the challenges being faced, why they are responding to these crises, and what you can do to help!

We welcome Canon Rob Esdaile to the Commission, who will be acting as our Priest Adviser, he will be taking over from Canon Kieron O'Brien - our grateful thanks to Fr Kieron for the support he has given us over the last few years.

My appreciation to Tessa Ricketts the diocesan Caritas Social Action Adviser, members of the Social Action Commission, and working parties for all their efforts and support.

*Ashley Ralston*

# WORKING PARTY REPORTS

## Refugee Crisis Working Group

Tessa Ricketts has been continuing to work with members of the Refugee Crisis Steering Group to raise awareness of, and distribute funds from, the diocesan Refugees Crisis Fund. Funds are quite depleted (it has been well used) so we have asked for donations across the parishes. If you are able to contribute, please contact Tessa;

**E:** Tessa.Ricketts@abdiocese.org.uk

To find out more visit the diocesan website:

**W:** [www.abdiocese.org.uk/rcf](http://www.abdiocese.org.uk/rcf)



## Refugee Week – 25 June 2022

Bishop Richard chaired a meeting at St Gabriel's Hall, Billingshurst, providing an opportunity for people across our parishes to share their experiences of supporting refugees across the diocese. It was a very useful meeting with many examples of the various ways people are helping – including news of guide being produced to support traumatized refugees. An online questionnaire was distributed to gain the 'bigger picture' and find volunteers willing to offer interpretation skills. We aim to hold another meeting this year to share ideas and best practice.

Tessa has been promoting the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in response to the Ukraine War. The initiative is a partnership project between the Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) and St John of God Hospitaller Services. It offers a matching, training, and support programme for hosts and displaced Ukrainian people.

For more information – particularly if you are able to host a Ukrainian person or family – please email;

**E:** homesforukraine@sjog.org.uk or visit;

**W:** [sjog-homesforukraine.uk](http://sjog-homesforukraine.uk)

## Modern Slavery Steering Group

It has been a busy but productive year raising awareness of the crime of modern slavery in our Diocese.

The group of voluntary Anti-Slavery Ambassadors representing Catholic and Anglican churches across Sussex and Surrey, have been working together to raise awareness and increase reporting of modern slavery in our communities, through giving talks and presentations. The team have run various events at local churches, particularly in support of Anti-Slavery Week in October 2022.

Several dedicated volunteers produced a short film "On Our Doorstep" which has been widely distributed across the South-East to help raise awareness and promote the Modern Slavery Helpline:

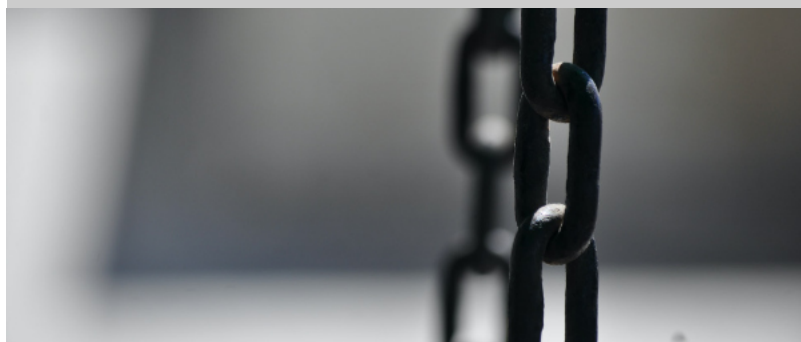
The team hope to encourage more people to become ambassadors in 2023, to spread awareness more widely across the two counties.

There is information on fighting slavery available on the diocesan website here;

<https://www.abdiocese.org.uk/formation/combating-modern-slavery>

For information on becoming an Anti-Slavery Ambassador please contact Tessa;

**E:** Tessa.Ricketts@abdiocese.org.uk



## Safe House

The diocesan Safe House, providing short term accommodation for victims of modern slavery, was launched this year in partnership with Sussex and Surrey police and the charity Justice and Care. It has not been used as much as had been hoped due in part to the complex needs of victims and survivors, with a review in the Spring.





## Environment Working Party (EWP)

We are working with the [Ecological Conversion Group](#) and gradually establishing a base which will allow us to move forward to the next phase – reaching out to our parishes.

The EWP have been actively involved in promoting COP 27 climate change principles as well as taking on board the biodiversity aspects of COP15, and regularly take part in webinars, conferences, petitions and meeting with local Members of Parliament – all of which highlight the climate crisis. We are aware of the various ethical issues (the diocese has been very helpful) and hope to be able to look at local Eco Audits and biodiversity challenges in the coming year.

The EWP have long-established links with the group Green Christian ([www.greenchristian.org.uk](http://www.greenchristian.org.uk)) who offer courses and programmes about caring for creation. The Catholic Bishops Conference have endorsed CAFOD's Live Simply programme (<https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/livesimply-award>) and have reissued a new edition of their teaching document 'The Call For Creation' (<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/the-call-of-creation/>)

Finding out more: The EWP can provide speakers and facilitators to help you and your parish. For more information email Ashley Ralston;

**E:** [ajralston37@gmail.com](mailto:ajralston37@gmail.com)

## Ecological Conversion Group and Journey to 2030

The Ecological Conversion Group, through [The Journey to 2030 project](#), are working hard to help the Church respond to the root causes of ecological and social crises. The Journey to 2030 website hosts a variety of different resources and activities, as well as signposting to local and national networks to encourage wider participation in social and ecological action.

The team are frequently adding new resources and pages to their website aimed at parishes, schools, and communities. You can visit their newest page aimed at schools here;

**W:** [journeyto2030.org/school/](http://journeyto2030.org/school/)





## Journey to 2030 website resources

**'Building a Caring Community' Activity Packs**  
[journeyto2030.org/poster-activity/](http://journeyto2030.org/poster-activity/)

The team have recently launched a 'Building a Caring Community' poster activity pack - an exciting new resource that introduces integral ecology as a lens for community mission linking faith, environmental and social action. The pack is designed as a starting point - or refresher - for communities to work together to address the needs of their local area and beyond.

**'Let Us Dream'**  
[journeyto2030.org/let-us-dream/](http://journeyto2030.org/let-us-dream/)

'Let Us Dream' is a creative activity to help communities imagine an ideal future, giving them a shared vision to work towards.

## Deanery workshops and Research Project

[journeyto2030.org/let-us-dream-activity-workshops-begin/](http://journeyto2030.org/let-us-dream-activity-workshops-begin/)

Journey to 2030 have been trialling ready-made resource packs and creative activities with deanery communities, in partnership with the Guardians of Creation behavioural change research project. Findings from these trials - exploring how to best encourage our Catholic community to act on climate change - should be published in the Spring with more workshops (aimed at parishioners of all ages and backgrounds) trialled across Arundel & Brighton in the coming months.

## Talks and Education

Journey to 2030 are continuing to deliver talks across the country, both in person and online. They will be rerunning their successful 'Living Laudato Si' retreats in partnership with Boarbank Hall having run two weekends in January and February. These online events invite individuals to come and share the joys and difficulties of environmental activism in their parishes, with expert speakers across several sessions sharing ideas and solutions to common problems.

To read the group's latest news and stories visit their blog;

**W:** [journeyto2030.org/blog/](http://journeyto2030.org/blog/)

For more information contact;

**E:** [jp@ecg.org](mailto:jp@ecg.org)





## National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN)

NJPN seeks to encourage work for justice and peace, promoting communication and shared action between members, supporters, and partners. Their next online Open Networking Day will take place on **February 25** via Zoom, focusing on the Cost of Living Crisis. Visit [www.justice-and-peace.org.uk](http://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk) to find out more.

This year's Conference - the NJPN's 45th - takes place **July 21-23**. The theme this year is *Sustainability, Survival or Shutdown*, you can find out more here;

**W:** <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/>

NJPN also issues a monthly newsletter and e-bulletin highlighting actions and articles of interests to members. To find out more visit the [group's website](#).

## Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group (GDWG)

*The deepening hostile environment and challenges to the right to claim asylum has caused a climate of fear, especially for those served with notices of intent of removal to Rwanda.*

A lack of safe routes of passage has led to people increasingly relying on small boats to reach the UK. Some have been taken into immigration detention with many, who are not able to speak English, arriving with just the clothes they were wearing.

This has meant a large increase in costs for interpreters and demand for clothes (GDWG has delivered over 1,000 parcels of good quality clothing to 872 people - thanks to everyone in the Diocese who donated clothes).

The number of people the charity support increased dramatically in 2022, with Gatwick Detainees' 7 staff and 90 volunteers extremely busy.

While the main thrust of the charity's work is supporting those experiencing detention, they also have an obligation to raise awareness of the cruelty of the system and try to change it. In 2017 an under-cover Panorama reporter exposed appalling physical and verbal abuse in Brook House [Immigration Removal Centre near Gatwick Airport.] Since then, GDWG have worked hard to force a Public Inquiry; eventually, following a Judicial Review, the government agreed.

The Public Inquiry only aimed to investigate certain aspects of immigration detention and GDWG therefore decided to hold their own inquiry to report at the same time as the official one to ensure all issues were laid bare.

After many months of work, a report on the charity's inquiry was finished and a presentation to Parliament organized. MPs of all parties attended with Alison Thewless MP, Stephen Kinnock MP, Alistair Carmichael MP and Crawley MP Henry Smith all speaking. A number of peers attended and faith leaders, including Bishop Richard – it was wonderful to have him there. The findings were presented by 3 people who had experienced detention with the recommendations of the Public Inquiry due to report in 2023. GDWG hope for change, in particular for a time limit on detention.

To find out more;

**E:** [josie@gdwg.org.uk](mailto:josie@gdwg.org.uk)





## **St Vincent de Paul (SVP)**

### **Spirituality**

Spirituality is an important aspect of SVP membership. There have been two events this last year that members have been invited to join: the first is the SVP National Pilgrimage to Walsingham which included the Sacrament of the Sick which returned after an absence of three years, the second is the Day of Reflection at the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation and St Francis in West Grinstead, organised by Tony Sims the Arundel & Brighton SVP Central Council President. The Day of Reflection was led by the SVP's National Spiritual Adviser Fr Paul Roache, a member of the Congregation of the Mission, started by St Vincent de Paul in 1625.

### **The Cost-of-Living Crisis**

Spiralling food and heating costs are driving the poorest deeper into poverty with local SVP Conferences being called upon to help with food parcels, warm clothing, the payment of fuel bills and other essential needs. Members are actively involved with food banks and are referring many people to SVP charity shops for affordable goods and - if necessary - funding their purchases of clothes from those shops.

Nationally the SVP has launched a £500,000 Cost-of-Living Fund, which is available to all Conferences to help people in need this winter, with grants up to a maximum of £500.

### **Provision of furniture**

There are Furniture Depots around Arundel & Brighton that deliver furniture to those in need. An SVP Furniture Scheme provides vouchers for essential furniture to be ordered from the local Emmaus Store in Brighton and Hove. The SVP then settles the cost of the furniture with Emmaus, who deliver the furniture free of charge.

Up to five referrals of people who have been placed in unfurnished accommodation, are received every week from Social Workers, the City Council Tenancy Sustainment Officers, Housing Associations and organisations such as the YMCA.

Each individual, family, or refugee referred is visited in chronological order unless - for instance - the SVP are informed of the urgent need of a cot for a newly born baby, or furniture for people being discharged from hospital.

### **Tower House Community Centre for Isolated older people**

This popular SVP project has suffered financial difficulties and some of its activities have been affected. However, Tower House will continue to welcome guests to lunches as often as practicable, with Tower House used as a 'warm space' for older people during the winter months.

### **Communication Club**

This year has seen the resumption of many community activities. The SVP Communication Club is one that has started up again - to the delight of its former members. The Club's purpose is to help 'hearing' people to learn and practice basic sign language to enable them to converse with people with hearing difficulties.

Sessions are held every Friday at Tower House; many Tower House guests have now joined the Club.

### **Twins**

The SVP is an International Society and Conferences around the country are twinned with Conferences, mainly in India.

Conferences in A&B currently support 90 'twins' with moderate annual grants to help them care for the needy in their parishes - students are also supported financially. Occasionally the SVP are asked by the twin to fund special projects. Recently, the Conference in Brighton has been asked to purchase milking buffalos for five families (one buffalo each); the milk will be for their own use, with surplus milk sold to earn some money.

### **Membership and recruitment**

While some SVP Conferences are flourishing, there are many around the diocese that are suffering due to having fewer members. As a result, the core work of the SVP; the visiting of the elderly, sick and housebound, is being neglected.

Conferences in A&B parishes would welcome new members - please do contact them if you could help for just one or two hours a week. You can find out more about the work and mission of the SVP on their website;

**W:** [www.svp.org.uk](http://www.svp.org.uk)





## The Story of CAFOD

CAFOD's story started over sixty years ago when a small group of people from UK Catholic Women's organisations got together to raise money for children in Dominica.

The women had heard about children going hungry on the small Caribbean island of Dominica. Moved to respond, they decided to raise funds to support a mother and baby clinic.

They wrote to every parish in the country asking families to pray and fast, eating just one simple meal for one day in Lent. They asked parishioners to donate any money they saved to a central collection – which is how the very first Family Fast Day came about.

The women thought they might raise about £500, but their idea was so enthusiastically received by Catholic parishes it raised £6,000 – much more than they ever hoped for. As well as funding the new clinic, the project also improved water supplies and enabled local people to develop their vegetable gardens.

Two years later, in 1962 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales formally recognised their initiative and CAFOD was born.

The determination to enable others to flourish and to challenge the behaviours that drive poverty and inequality remain at the heart of CAFOD's vision today. Thanks to CAFOD's partnership with people across England and Wales, your prayerful solidarity, and dedicated support, the charity continues to hold Family Fast Days every Lent and Harvest. Moved by compassion, and with respect for every person's dignity, CAFOD are the hands of Christ bringing hope to the world.

Not only are CAFOD celebrating an amazing legacy which continues to shape their current way of working, but they are also looking to the future of the planet, our Common Home. The social and environmental consequences of the climate crisis threaten the very survival of life on earth. Everyone is at risk, but the poorest and most vulnerable of our sisters and brothers are already feeling the effects of this crisis and will be hit the hardest.

CAFOD's response is one of hope, compassion, solidarity and dignity. The charity write: "We know that change can happen because CAFOD supporters across England and Wales have made that change happen, time and time again over the last 60 years. Poverty is not part of God's plan – we believe a better world is possible.

"We continue to work, with your support, to eliminate poverty and its causes, to bring about a more equal sharing of the earth's resources, so that everyone may have enough for their needs, while respecting the Earth, Our Common Home."

### How to get involved

CAFOD's work would be impossible without the generosity and kindness of people of all ages, cultures and backgrounds who serve and support them tirelessly. The charity have a variety of volunteers working in Arundel & Brighton parishes and schools, but urgently need new school and parish volunteers in various parishes. To find out more about volunteering please contact;

**E:** [arundelandybrighton@cafod.org.uk](mailto:arundelandybrighton@cafod.org.uk)

Or **T:** 07710 094448



### CAFOD's LiveSimply Award

The LiveSimply award is an opportunity for Catholic communities - parishes, schools, religious orders and chaplaincies - to respond to Pope Francis' invitation in Laudato Si' to "work with generosity and tenderness in protecting this world which God has entrusted to us".

It is an opportunity to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with people in our communities around the world. Becoming a LiveSimply parish or school shows that the Church is taking a lead in the fight against climate change and poverty in the local community.

Our Diocese has four schools and three parishes signed up to LiveSimply, with three parishes registered, and eight parishes and one school presented with a LiveSimply Award.

CAFOD are hoping to see all parishes and schools take up the challenge by 2030, which is a crucial year in the fight against climate change. If your organisation is interested in signing up our diocesan Volunteer Coordinator would be happy to answer any questions by email, telephone, or by having an informal meeting.

To find out more please contact Rod Thick;

**E:** rod.504t@ntlworld.com

or sign up online here;

**W:** [cafod.org.uk/Campaign/LiveSimply-award](https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/LiveSimply-award)



### The Cherish Life Network

The Cherish Life Network is intended for those who wish to engage in the defense of human life, whether this be spiritually, through practical help, or by giving witness.

It does this primarily by sharing information and offering the opportunity for members to link directly with other network members, perhaps by geographical area or by type of activity, offering opportunities to work together.

The Network encourages and facilitates engagement to protect human life at all stages. During 2023 the group will:

- Continue to resist all moves which deny women the chance of finding alternatives to abortion and protection from coercion to abort. In particular, opposing Clause 9 of the Government's Public Order Bill (originally a back-bench amendment) which would, if passed, prohibit any offer of help, or even prayer, in the vicinity of any abortion clinic.

- Call on the Government to objectively assess and acknowledge the impact of 'at home' abortions on the mental and physical wellbeing of women. For the sake of women, we need the sanction for such abortions to be reviewed and withdrawn.

- Oppose ongoing moves to legalise assisted suicide, highlighting clear evidence from other countries that what is initially presented as a 'right' can quickly come to be perceived as an obligation.

For further information click on the 'Join Our Groups' link here;

**W:** <https://abdiocese.org.uk/formation-team>

Or contact the CLN coordinator, Pauline Gately;

**E:** p.gately@outlook.com





Pact (Prison Advice & Care Trust) is the national Catholic charity for prisons which, for 125 years, has been dedicated to supporting people affected by imprisonment. Our staff and volunteers can be found in all the prisons in the Diocese of Arundel & Brighton, providing caring and life changing services to men and women in prison, to people with convictions, and to their families. We strive to treat all people with respect and believe that everyone should have the opportunity to make a fresh start.

Pact's Faith in Action Team has been meeting people across the Diocese both at in-person JustPeople workshops (hosted by St. Dunstan's Catholic Church Woking and St. Pancras Catholic Church Lewes), as well as at online Zoom workshops. The workshops are times of prayer and reflection on Catholic Social Teaching through the lens of people affected by imprisonment. They're free to attend and come with no strings attached. That said, we are delighted that we now have a growing number of Pact Parish Reps and several new Pact volunteers in the Diocese.

New for 2022 was a Stations of the Cross liturgy, prepared by Pact, including words from those who have lived experience of the criminal justice system. During Lent Bishop Richard led this liturgy in the chapel at HMP Send in a deeply moving service. The text is available for use in parishes and groups and can be found on our website under the Pact for Parishes and Group tab of our website (details below).

Each year Prisoners' Sunday falls on the second Sunday of October, a day which is vitally important in raising awareness of the impact and challenges of imprisonment. We are very grateful to all the parishes which marked this day, perhaps with a Pact speaker and having a second collection for our work. We are especially grateful to Bishop Richard, also Liaison Bishop for Prisons, for celebrating a Prisoners' Sunday Mass at Arundel Cathedral and for his constant support and guidance.

Christmas is a particularly difficult time for both prisoners and their families, especially children. Thanks to a generous response to our Operation Elf appeal, we were able to support many prisoners across the Diocese to give their children a present, in the form of a gift card, at special Christmas Family Days. We're hugely grateful to everyone who supported this appeal but a special mention goes to St Francis Catholic Primary School, Caterham, where the Year 6 RE monitors organised a toy and book sale, raising over £200 for gift cards for HMP Downview.

Grateful thanks also go to the parishioners of Bognor Regis & Slindon who donated 90 gift bags each containing a £15 gift card and festive chocolate for Operation Elf at HMP Ford and HMP Lewes.

With the continuing cost of living crisis and the rising prison population, 2023 will no doubt continue to bring many challenges for prisoners and their families. Please keep Pact's work in your prayers and if you'd like to join us at a JustPeople workshop or find out about opportunities to volunteer or work with us please visit our website;

**W:** [www.prisonadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk)

Or contact Marie or Theresa;

**E:** [parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk)







## Diocesan Fairtrade Report

Diocesan Trustees have accepted the Fairtrade Policy submitted by the Group. It now appears on the Diocesan website and was highlighted in an article on the diocesan website and in its weekly E-Bulletin.

During its meetings the Group has discussed the possibility of introducing being a Fairtrade Church as part of the criteria of the LiveSimply Church programme and successfully pursued this with CAFOD.

Contact was also made with the Eco, Young and Engaged project (EYE) with the Convenor attending a conference in Worthing where Fairtrade school information was provided to the teaching staff of local primary and secondary schools.

Fairtrade farmers led the Be Fair With Your Climate Promise at COP26, with over 333,000 people backing their challenge to world leaders. The Fairtrade Foundation had recently been reviewing its Award

scheme to make it simpler and to present its future priorities, the changes outlined presented via Zoom seminars, were both very positive and welcome. The diocesan Group, with the help of CAFOD SE, is now trying to survey all parishes in the Diocese to check on their Fairtrade Church status.

The Group would like to expand its membership across the Diocese and welcomes volunteers.

Despite the difficulties posed by COVID, Traidcraft sales throughout parishes have remained high. Fairtrade Fortnight 2023 will run from 27 February until 12 March with the continuing focus of the effect of climate change on farmers and producers in the developing world.

For more information contact Susan Joy;

**E:** [susanjoy471@hotmail.com](mailto:susanjoy471@hotmail.com)



To find out more about the groups and projects mentioned in this year's report, or to join any of the Working parties please contact:

**Tessa Ricketts, diocesan Caritas Social Action Adviser**

**E:** [Tessa.Ricketts@abdiocese.org](mailto:Tessa.Ricketts@abdiocese.org)

Or **Ashley Ralston, Chair of the Social Action Commission**

**E:** [ajralston37@gmail.com](mailto:ajralston37@gmail.com)

**[www.abdiocese.org.uk](http://www.abdiocese.org.uk)**

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