



# Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation

SPRING 2017

NEWSLETTER

## Joy in the Risen Lord!

Here are four short quotes to bring hope, an antidote to the deep wounds of our world today. This is as we contemplate our world threatened by escalating tension between nuclear powers the rising threat of irreversible climate change and so many acts of terror and violence, so many displaced and so much injustice.

- Jesus marked out the path of non-violence. He walked that path to the very end, to the Cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility

- The women did not run away, they remained steadfast, they knew the bitter taste of injustice. We see them before the tomb, filled with grief but equally incapable of accepting that things must always end this way.

- The Lord is alive! He is living and he wants to rise again in all the faces that have buried hope, buried dreams, buried dignity.

*From Pope Francis*

- Each of us has a capacity for great good and that is what makes God say it was well worth the risk of bringing us into existence

*From Archbishop  
Desmond Tutu*



## Rwanda Sisterhood Association (RSA)

RSA was created after the genocide against the TUTSI in 1994, by a support group of Rwandan women living in the UK, to bring together women uprooted from their motherland and give them a space in which to develop social cohesion and work together as contributing citizens. This is particularly important for Rwandans whose lives had been badly fractured by the genocide.

The Project: One of our main projects is "Mama Pack", a pack (baby wrapper, cord clamp, baby diapers, birth mat, baby overalls, pads, soaps, sterilised gloves and surgical blade, baby vest, African wrapper) for the basic needs of expectant mothers in Africa, to increase the safety of their delivery and to protect their newborn infant. We have currently sent hundreds of "Mama Packs" to Rwanda.

Two among the supported women were homeless with two severely disabled children. The first child, Jacques, is a 2-year-old boy, undergoing a very costly treatment. Because he is still very young, we have been assured by



his surgeon that his disability is reversible. The second child is a 4-year-old girl. Her mother was dismissed by her husband for having given birth to a disabled child. With the help of a generous donor, RSA has provided a customised wheelchair for her six months ago. This was a great relief for her mother, who could hardly carry her any longer, because she was getting too heavy.

We still provide financial support for medical care, food, and accommodation to both mothers and their two children. We also paid the "Mutuelle de Santé", free medical care, for this year for over 50 most vulnerable women. We meet about six times a year, on Saturday, from 4pm onwards to prepare events, outreach, get feedback, pack up "Mama Packs", etc. We also meet three times a year for International Women Day and for the Rwanda National Days.

All donations go to Souvenir (the foundress of RSA): [souvenir.m@rwandasisterhood.org](mailto:souvenir.m@rwandasisterhood.org) or to the Sisterhood Association: Lloyds TSB Account number: 26995468 Sort

Code: 30-92-90 Reference: [The donor's name] Sr Asterie adds: 'I've been attending most of the meetings that take place here in London. While others go occasionally to Coventry, Birmingham, Sheffield, Oxford, etc. (members are scattered around the country and beyond) to visit or participate/support Sisterhood Association in different events (social, cultural, and in particular, national). I am mainly involved in 3 areas:

-Offering an environment for social interaction and support (dialogue, prayer services)

-Promoting a culture of understanding and tolerance



few as this work is done only during our community recreations'

*Sr Asterie, Kensington*

## I Choose Fish - a story from Vietnam

Sr Emmanuel Bac alerted us to a recent disaster on the Vietnamese central coast: Many times in life people have to make a choice: either to catch and sell fish, or to develop the steel industry' said an official from Formosa steel plant, a massive multi-national corporation with a large plant on Vietnam's beautiful coast. Last April the sea had turned red from an under-sea dump pipeline from the Formosa plant causing unprecedented fish kills, tons of them washed up on the shore, not only small shallow water fish but also rare species living in deep water and far off shore. Large demonstrations ensued, social media erupted with the hashtag 'I choose fish'. The Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development concluded the fish kill was due to poisoned water. Nearly a year on and the area is still suffering, people fear to eat fish, seafood restaurants are now stocked with chicken and pork, tourism has stalled, investors have got cold feet so there are half built hotels on the outskirts of towns, the fishermen are desperate in spite of fish being caught so easily but no-one dares eat the fish; those

who try find themselves in hospital.

To make matters worse the state inspectors were at first refused entry to Formosa's land to carry out tests. Eventually thanks to reporters, protestors and concerned citizen who really raised the alarm, Formosa did allow inspectors in. Even so the government's full scientific report failed to appear and it was suspected their reason was that there were a lot of heavy metals involved which a very toxic and stay in the food chain for a very long time. This disaster has meant a loss of trust in government; the traditional non-involvement with politics is changing as people see how politics and government policies, or lack of them as far as pollution is concerned, are affecting their lives. Nationalism too, is amplifying anger about the



environment. It adds insult to injury that Formosa is perceived to be a Chinese company (though it is actually Taiwanese) poisoning the Vietnamese coast exacerbating old rivalries in the South China sea.

Formosa has apologised but the compensation offered is paltry. It remains to be seen how this is translated into a real care for the environment and clean-up of the Vietnamese coastline. Formosa has a terrible record over pollution and has been 'awarded' the Black Planet award for companies most damaging to the environment. In the meantime, public protests continue. This March the demonstrators demanded 'greater action about Formosa'. The police responded, the protestors were abused. The government (CPV) is gradually trying to become greener as the party is accused of protecting polluters from abroad. The tragedy is unfinished.

*Sr Emmanuel Bac, Wanstead*

*Acknowledgments to Linh Tong – article in the Diplomat, and in the Economist February 18<sup>th</sup> 2017. 'Red v Green'.*

# Walking With -a Project for Asylum Seekers & Refugees

Ages ago Jess asked me for another 'write up' on "Walking With" - the Project for Asylum Seekers and Refugees where Sylvia and I do voluntary work. After a bit of a bumpy ride a couple or so years ago, the Project now seems to be going from strength to strength. We have a lovely Project Manager who is very warm and welcoming to all our clients, and also to the Volunteers; she really worries about the clients and especially those who are experiencing big problems and difficulties. Nothing seems to be too much trouble for her – and the same can be said for the volunteers – she also takes a great interest in Esther, sending her a beautiful bunch of flowers when she moved into her flat.

We have about 15 volunteers; some work both Mondays and Wednesdays, but mainly one or other day. All of them are very generous with their time, and some work on other days as well for the clients. On most Mondays, one of the volunteers who is a keen cook and knows a lot about food from all over the world, runs a cooking group. Sometimes she does the cooking with a client or two helping, and other days she gives support to anyone who may have offered to cook a meal from their country of origin - in which case they tell her what they need for cooking and she will buy the necessary ingredients – then everyone who is in the building is invited to come and sit down round a big table to share a meal together, it could be 20+ people; the meal has quite a Biblical/Gospel feel to it.

About 18 months ago the Project Manager was approached by the Local Council, asking if, because of our previous 15 or so years of experience, we would be able to take responsibility for the welcome and care of 5 Syrian families who would be sent to Wallsend when the first party of Syrians arrived in this country. The Volunteers were all asked how they felt about this because of all the extra work that would be involved. Everybody agreed unanimously that we



should say "yes", and those of us with cars would be more involved with the families as and when necessary, while the rest of us would concentrate on the day to day running of the Project. So, after umpteen meetings with various different members of the Local Council who were very cooperative, plans were made to welcome the 5 families – 10 adults and 12 children.

Each family had a house prepared for them, fully furnished and equipped; 3 in one area of Wallsend and 2 in a different one. All their legal papers were in order so all that had to be done was to take the adults to the Job Centre for them to sign on to claim their allowances. All that was then expected of the adults was to learn English so that they would be able to work. The children had places in school so that they

could slot in easily, though one or two changes had to be made here if the school proved to be unsuitable for the child. As well as all this preparation the Volunteers were given 2 days of 'in-service' training - one on Syrian customs and culture and the other how to relate to people who had suffered torture.

When the families eventually arrived at the end of May they seemed to settle in well and quickly. We also had a Syrian lady employed by the Council who was there to support them in all their needs, and who speaks good English. In the early days of coming the children were petrified of policemen and aeroplanes, because of bad memories back in Syria; fortunately the families seem to have been well received by the local community, and now we are awaiting the arrival of 5 more families from Syria early next year, some of whom may be relatives of the families already here.

*Sr Elizabeth Mary, Newcastle*

Check out the project's website for a short video about Walking With: [www.walkingwith-nt.btck.co.uk](http://www.walkingwith-nt.btck.co.uk)



## 'Walking With'

### IN NORTH TYNESIDE

# Shedding Light on Modern Slavery

It is estimated there are at least 13,000 people in the UK in modern slavery, out of these one in four are children. The exploitation takes many forms, sexual, criminal, labour and domestic servitude, these are the most common. They may be working in factories, construction, agriculture, car washes and nail bars etc; they may not be wearing chains but with passports taken from them and fear of the immigration authorities, with threats to life and family, they will be securely tied within. Human trafficking is a market driven criminal industry, it is huge, second largest after the arms trade, and it is growing. Migrations of people fleeing war, famine and dire poverty make recruiting very easy. These are 'wounds in the body of humanity' (Pope Francis). Many people are unaware that this modern slavery exists, perhaps next door.



St Mary's Twickenham has just instituted a Centre for the study of Modern Slavery. Cardinal Vincent Nichols came to the inauguration, he said Mass on the feast of Josephine Bakhita here at St Mary's. This was followed by a very full two-day conference with speakers from all perspectives. We heard about the gaps in the data, the impunity for slavers, the need for companies to know employment practices in their supply chains, the problem of identifying victims, the lack of investment and training at the local level, pressures and lack of personnel in the Border Force. and the Gangmasters Licencing Authority (GLA) which will be playing a larger part in the future, the need for advocacy and legal assistance. A large part of the problem is that issues of slavery and trafficking come under the auspices of 'immigration' whereas really it should be an issue of 'human rights'. We heard of the need for more support and safe houses for the victims of slavery and trafficking. Bakhita House is doing this but so much more is needed.



A young person will arrive at the UK border, he says he is going to stay with his cousin in Birmingham, but he does not have a mobile, nor a contact number. These are signs that he may have been trafficked: he may be warned of the dangers of slavery and exploitation: he may not see himself as a victim as he will have been promised the earth by the traffickers who have 'befriended' him: he may be referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) which is supposed to identify indicators of trafficking, but even if trafficked he will not necessarily get 'leave to remain'; he may prefer the risk. We were told that the NRM was in need of reform and was not fit for purpose... there is work to be done. There needs to be more work on supply chains, better resourcing for social workers, the Border force and the GLA, more public awareness and policy based on evidence. This is where St Mary's comes in the Centre aims to

advance human dignity with evidence based study of modern slavery' as well as research and facilitating collaboration. The Conference was a wonderful start.

The final speaker was Gary Craig from the Wilberforce Institute who has been working on modern slavery for the last 12 years. He finished by telling us of the specially created Modern Slavery Garden that took prizes at last year's Chelsea Flower Show. In the garden was a newly bred rose, the Modern Slavery Rose, he encouraged us to get it. We did. We decided to get one for St Mary's too.

We had a little liturgy as we planted our rose. 'The Lord hears the cry of the poor.... Every spirit crushed He will save. 'I have heard the groaning of the House of Israel, enslaved by the Egyptians'...' I will deliver you...' O Lord hear my prayer... The rose was liberally sprinkled with holy water and everyone helped to surround the plant with soil and firm it in. Sr Josephine Bakhita, pray for us.

*Sr. Jess, Twickenham*

**STOP MODERN SLAVERY**

# Disability and the Integrity of creation

It struck me that we human beings can handicap God's wonderful Creation.

If we consider the non human element there are many challenges: pollution of our oceans, destruction of our priceless forests, global warming to name but three.

The TV programme concerning global warming and Yellowstone National Park illustrated well our responsibility for damaging the eco system. Part of the programme focussed on the survival of tow orphaned Grizzly bear cubs. Their food source from the supply of white pine nuts had dried up. The pines had died because of global warming. Their mother had been killed by hunters with no apparent thought for the cubs. The cubs had adapted

and learned to forage for Caraway roots down on some ranch land during the heat of the day. The normal time was to feed at night when it was cooler but somehow these two learnt that a huge male grizzly bear would probably attack and kill them. This is only one small incident in the panorama of climate change and our damage possibly though the use of fossil fuels?

Maybe it is possible that the rest of Creation has" rights" which we have not fully understood? We are all linked and when one thing however small, is damaged we are all diminished.

So, yes I believe we do create "disabling" situations but they can be recognised and changed. For example the halting of the ivory trade; trading

rhino horn; endangered species being sold as "designer" pets. Everyone in their own special way can help the environment, that might be growing plants to attract bees; holes in our garden fences for hedgehogs; clearing up litter; greening our front gardens; all enabling actions.

*Sr Muriel, St Catherine's*



## Humankind and impairments

Maybe wheelchair users spring to mind? Hopefully some people reading this watched the BBC's foreign reporter Frank Gardener and his trip to Papua, New Guinea in search of the Bird of Paradise. The role of the whole team and especially of the explorer Benedict Allen enabled frank's deepest wish to be fulfilled. None of the many setbacks stopped the expedition.

Melanie Reid another Times journalist, also writes beautifully about life as a tetraplegic. The so called disabled are increasingly being employed by the BBC which is appropriate as it reflects the reality of society.

The Para Olympics in Stratford also gave a marvellous boost to those with certain handicaps.

Recently I have taken to using a walking stick. On arrival at St Catherine's I went to examine our Potting shed. In one corner was a plethora of sticks. Later I learnt they were on offer as support for shrubsetc. My initial thought was: we will get rid of all that clobber and tidy up! A month later I hobbled into the shed and selected the stoutest stick I could find. It is now my constant companion or almost. I spend much time forgetting where I have lodged it. I had the good fortune to sit in the needy area of a 28 Bus next to a chap with a stick. I admired his ebony, decorated cane and we chatted about sticks. On disembarking he said: "someone nicked my last one. It was a beauty!"



*Sr Muriel, St Catherine's*

PS. If you ever have your very own stick, thank God daily for it. Excellent tool for dealing with Blackberry bushes.

