

Open letter from Anne Peacey, Chair of the National Justice & Peace Network, to Paul Donovan. (November 2010)

Dear Paul,

It is great that the debate on J&P activities has arisen and people are questioning the opportunity for formation in justice spirituality, as is actually having a Bishop engage publicly with the discussion. The body of his article is to be applauded.

However, I was deeply concerned that the very first paragraph in Peter Smith's article quoted you as having written 'a pretty scathing criticism of the National Justice and Peace Network Conference' I was not at all aware that you found the Conference so unsatisfactory but rather that you were being critical of the J&P movement generally.

If that was not what you really meant and your comments have been misinterpreted I would be interested to know if it was editing by The Universe or if Peter Smith himself made an error. Either way, in fairness to all those who organised the most successful Conference NJPN has managed over many years, it would be good if you were to clarify the point. If in fact you were intending to deliver 'a pretty scathing criticism of the National Justice and Peace Network Conference,' it would be good if you could suggest improvements in preparation for next year.

All the suggestions made by the organising group in their evaluation of the Conference have been taken on board by the working party preparing for next year's conference. Some points have been accepted in their entirety and others in part as appropriate.

The working party for Conference 2011 is strong and consists of a number of grassroots J&P people from around the country reflecting the topic of the conference, which you will be aware is that of 'Justice at Work - a place of safety, fulfillment and growth?' There will be important input from trades union representatives as well as emphasis on CST, with workshops providing opportunity to develop skills and increase knowledge. If this is not making a contribution to ongoing adult formation I don't know what is.

You say that J&P people 'just do not get it' It would be good if you could make more explicit what exactly this 'it' is, then perhaps we could look for it. I know as well as you that the Church as a whole does not prioritise development of a mature adult spirituality of justice but you cannot say that NJPN does not try. We may fail miserably, in your opinion, but I repeat we do try and you cannot put the lack of ongoing formation solely at the door of NJPN.

You comment, at some point that NJPN is only concerned with Conference and I am sorry that you appear to be so dismissive of our area open meetings. Membership of NJPN has developed over the last four years to include groups and individuals as well as the representatives of diocese, NGOs and religious congregations. This is so

that we may reach out to all, including those not linked into a diocesan structure and this is one of the main reasons for holding meetings around the country. The format of these meetings varies according to the content, and takes account of evaluations of the previous meeting. What people are asking for at the present time include: listening to a speaker, opportunity to share experiences and learn from J&P activities around the country, to report on successful campaigns and for NGOs to disseminate information and ideas for group J&P action. The topics covered by speakers over the last year or so have covered aspects of CST, St. Paul and justice, Live Simply in an age of austerity, The response of Christians to use of torture by our elected representatives, Challenging Church structures to create a new model of Church. I could go on.

David Jackson is to facilitate our next area meeting to be held at CAFOD on 20 November. This will be an opportunity to examine the teaching contained in the Bishops' statement : "Meeting God in Friend and Stranger" so that we can relate to those of other faiths with confidence and understanding as we engage in the mission of our Church. The document was some 10 years in the writing and was supported in those years by the Bishops' Committee of other Religions, of which David Jackson was a member.

As well as the Conference working party, the Environment WP and Ethical Investment WP are actively working to increase our awareness of related issues which, in turn leads to political engagement by individuals and groups.

I am sure you are already aware of most of this activity but it seem it sometimes needs to be pointed out. It becomes somewhat disheartening when it appears that whenever lack of action on issues of justice and peace is discussed NJPN is specifically named, as though this network is at the root of this lack of action.

Unfortunately none of us can hold back the aging process, indeed the Church should be grateful that: "the children of the 1960s and 70s" stick with the struggle "to live out the teachings of Vatican II."

Sincerely,

Anne