

THE LONDON CATHOLIC WORKER

free/donation

lent/easter 2025

issue 78

Editorial: Statement on UK Rearmament

The London Catholic Worker's response to the UK Government's decision to increase military spending

In 1940, Dorothy Day, Servant of God and co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, wrote that “we stand unalterably opposed to war as a means of saving ‘Christianity,’ ‘civilization,’ ‘democracy.’ We do not believe that they can be saved by these means,” with the understanding that support for the industrialised slaughter of men, women, and children which constitutes modern warfare cannot be reconciled with the vision of human dignity proclaimed in the Gospel.



Spirit, Moya Barnett, 2025

Last year, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales declared that “as Christians, we are called by Jesus to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). In the modern world, an integral aspect of this mission involves working to limit the proliferation of weapons and advance the cause of global disarmament.” Pope Francis said that “to allocate a large part of spending to weapons means taking it away from something else, which means continuing to take it away from those who lack the necessities. Continuing to spend on weapons sullies the soul, sullies the heart, sullies humanity.”

Keir Starmer's government has announced its intention to enact the largest increase in British military spending since the end of the Cold War, which will eventually cost an additional £13.4 billion every year. For comparison, lifting the two-child benefit cap, widely regarded as the single most cost-effective means of reducing child poverty, would cost £2.8 billion a year – the government has refused to do so on the basis that it would be unaffordable. This vast expenditure on arms will be partly funded by drastic reductions in foreign aid, likely to result in thousands of preventable deaths. Other European nations are making similar commitments in response to the supposed collective threat posed by Russia, a nation with an economy less than half the size of Germany's, and a military budget which even during a major war is a small fraction of that of the European members of NATO, and roughly a tenth of the USA's.

There is no moral or practical justification for wasting resources on arms, and we condemn the decision to do so in accordance with the teaching of the Church, the witness of the Gospel, and the evidence of our consciences. Jesus asks us “What profit will a person have if they gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?” Following him, we cannot buy security at this price.

This Issue: Hoping Beyond Borders pp. 2-3; Pausing for Prayer pp. 4-5; Humble Service pp. 6-7; Solidarity and Racial Justice pp. 8-9; Assisted Dying Bill pp. 10-11; Deadly Ceasefire in Gaza p. 12; Capildeo Poem p. 13; From the Archives p. 13; A Journey North pp. 14-15

Hope in Spite of Present Difficulties

Martin Newell on the power of hope to break down our borders

We seem to be constantly living with the contradictions of hope and difficulty here at Giuseppe Conlon House.

Usually, it is a long, slow grind for those who are guests living here with us, but in the last year, six of the men living with us were granted 'leave to remain' and were able to move on with their lives, despite the roadblocks of bureaucracy, the housing crisis, and the 'hostile environment'. And we were able to help one to get compensation from the Windrush scheme. Lots of work on our buildings has also created a more pleasant, safer house to live in, thanks mostly to Tom, Richie, and Francisco, as well as Jurgen's team. Tom and Natalie moved into their own home so they could welcome their baby, Silas, after a year and a half of marriage and a real health scare. At the same time, we have a great new team of Catholic Workers who have joined us in the last few months. Francisco, Moya, and Dottie have joined myself and Thomas. Together, these changes have enabled us to re-open the night shelter in the hall, at the same time as continuing to welcome guests into the community house. We welcomed our first guests into the shelter when I started writing this article a few weeks ago. We will soon be full again, with a house abuzz with life, grace, blessings, and challenge.

In the Catholic world, 2025 is a Jubilee Year of Hope. Pope Francis is trying to remind us of the importance not of superficial optimism, but of hope as an active and theological virtue: a deep trust that God is good, that God is love, and that Love has come into the world, and continues to do so with each child born and each act of generosity, care, or tenderness. These are truths we witness in the midst of struggle in a house of hospitality, where we might be 'entertaining angels without knowing it' (Hebrews 13:2).

At the same time, living among refugees and asylum seekers, the fate of those trying to get to the UK and the EU is never far from our minds. We remember and pray for those who have lost their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean and the English Channel, in particular during our monthly prayer and protest vigil outside the Home Office. And Thomas has recently pointed out that according to the UN, more people are now dying in the Sahara than in the Mediterranean, at least in part due to EU and UK funding for north African 'border forces', who often simply take migrants out into the desert and leave them there to die.

It can be hard for us to reconcile times that seem good for our life and work, but are also times of sadness, loss, tragedy, anxiety, or anger elsewhere. Recently, the Tottenham Refugee Alliance had to give up on finding a house to rent locally where they could sponsor and welcome a Syrian refugee family. The rents are just too high: it was impossible for them to find anywhere within the Local Housing Allowance (or Housing Benefit cap, in 'old money'). As a result, we have received a good share of what was left of the money raised for that project. We are sad that they were unable to find a house, but grateful to receive the resources they had collected.

Reading the Times

I went on retreat at the start of Advent. It was a challenging and fruitful time, as I pondered where God has brought me to and where I am being led, in the midst of so much uncertainty, as so often seems to be the way with Catholic Worker life. Of course, the uncertainty is not just about our life here in the house. It feels like we are living in a world of so much uncertainty right now.

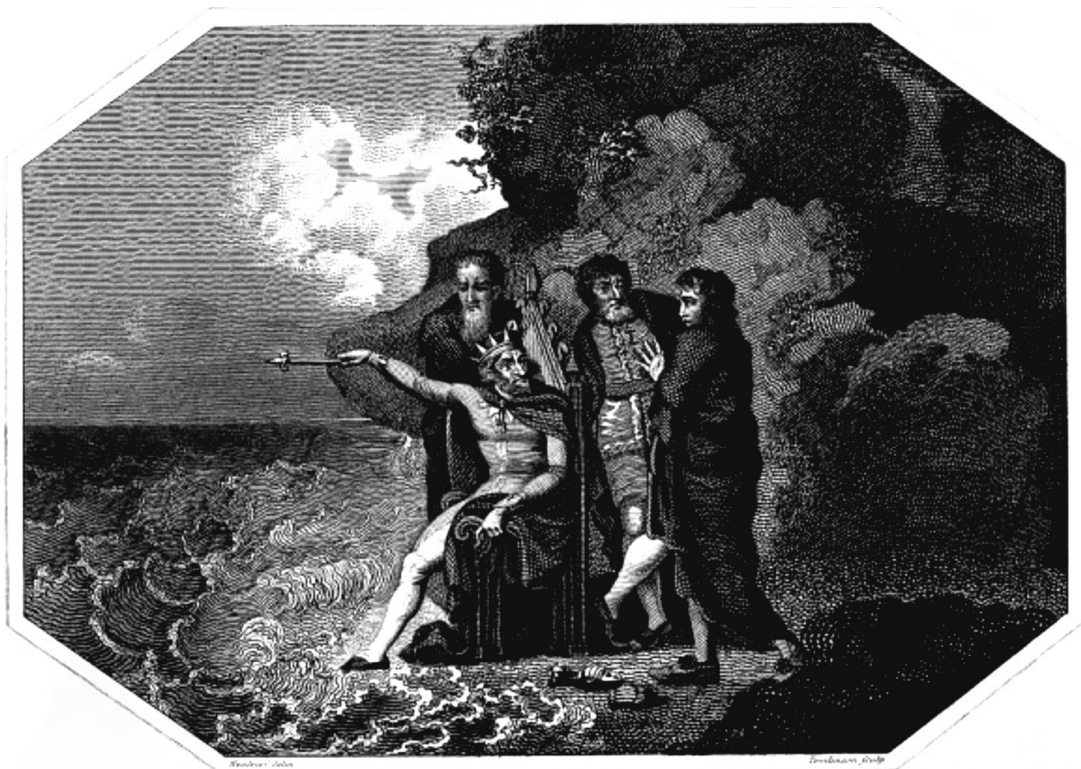
Jesus tells us to read the times. Reading our times at this moment in history makes me aware of the apparently powerful gods, idols, and demons of the new world order who blasphemously demand our allegiance, or at least seek to determine our futures. Uppermost in my mind right now are AI (artificial intelligence), the climate and environmental emergency, and Donald Trump and his allies both in the US and elsewhere, ‘moving fast and breaking things’ (or more accurately, breaking people), and his frenemies like Vladimir Putin, playing chicken with nuclear threats and preparations for war that should be no more (Isaiah 2:4). The times feel very dangerous as well as uncertain. We all are being played in a high-stakes game of Russian roulette. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists recently moved the hands of the Doomsday clock to 89 seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever been. We will write more about this in our next newsletter, when we have had more time to reflect on what is happening.

When I was a teenager, I told my Dad about a news story reporting that the Soviet countries would not let their people leave. I said “that’s terrible isn’t it.” He replied “well, if they did let them leave, we wouldn’t let them in”.

These seem prophetic words today, revealing that it is not human nature that has changed, but the situation.

It is tragic that so many have to flee poverty, violent conflict, and persecution, which are fed by such things as the arms trade and climate change. On the other hand, at least they are allowed to leave and have the resources and ability to be able to flee. The poorest still do not have that ‘luxury’. And it is the same ability to travel fast and cheaply that so many Brits take for granted when going on foreign holidays that enables many from the global south to at least aspire to follow the wealth and the work to where it has been taken. Rich countries like ours are like King Canute, trying to hold back the tide of human movement. As we tell our house guests, if you look at the Earth from space, there are no lines around it. Borders that keep the poor out are not God’s creation or will. Nor are the injustices and suffering that both push and pull people to move. We pray that refugees are welcomed here. And equally, that they will not have to leave home in the first place and travel safely when they do, as we wish for our own family and friends.

Martin Newell



Engraving of King Canute with Courtiers, Anon

Taking Time for God

Br Johannes Maertens on the importance of making space for the Spirit

"You must know when to find your own, quiet moment of solitude. But you must know when to open the door to go be with others, and you must know how to open the door. There is no point in opening the door with bitterness and resentment in your heart." - Dorothy Day, A Radical Devotion.



*Candle,
Moya
Barnett,
2025*

I recognise what our dear Dorothy was writing about; working with volunteers, homeless people, and refugees can be frustrating at times, especially in light of the current housing crisis we are experiencing in this country. It is scandalous how little housing for ordinary and poor people has been built compared to office and tower blocks and hotels for the very wealthy in London. And so, there are moments when frustration leads to compassion fatigue and, sadly, sometimes resentment. Then I know it is time to take a break and recharge my batteries.

Luckily, in our Catholic and Church of England churches, we have several monasteries and abbeys that are ideal places for that much-needed

silence and solitude. And although I live in a priory in London, a few times a year I go for a silent retreat to an abbey not too far outside the city. One of those places I go to is the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Crawley Down, near Gatwick, where the monks live a life in silence; even meals are eaten in silence. Every day, the monks pray for unity between Christians and to learn from the 'One Tradition' of our common early Church and early monasticism. But, like almost everything in the West, it is a well-organised place, and you need to email and book in advance before going, as the number of rooms is limited!

"The quieter you become, the more you hear."

Why do I go for a silent retreat? Well, as I wrote, to recharge my batteries, but I have also learned that when I become more silent, I can actually hear more. It gives me much more headspace and makes me more compassionate again.

"Listening" lies at the heart of monastic life. Sometimes, God speaks more clearly to you after a time of silence and a bit of prayer. God's voice can be a whisper, an understanding of what you should do next, a dream, or a piece of Bible text that clearly speaks to you.

There are different ways God speaks to each of us, but we need to practise listening. And it is not just about listening to

God, but also oneself.

Personally, I enjoy being in the surrounding woodlands in the presence of the Divine. On my last visit, I was looking at an enormous and beautiful oak tree through which the Creator's magnificence shone: a deeply spiritual experience.

"But I have quieted and stilled my soul, like a weaned child on his mother's breast; so my soul is quieted with me." - Ps 131:3

Being in nature is healthy for our mental wellbeing, and so is silence, but silence can also be very confronting. When all the noise and busyness around you falls away, the pain, stress, and questions you struggle with can become very present. The presence of a monastic may be needed to guide you in that silence, especially if you are not used to it. I remember a few years ago, I was staying at the St. Antonius Coptic Monastery in Germany with my dear Orthodox friend Father George, and even though I was clearly not dressed as an Orthodox monk but wearing my Catholic habit, many people came to talk. There was a deep need; people wanted to reflect on their daily struggles and spiritual hunger.

"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses. A new heart I

will give you, and put a new spirit within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” - Ezek 36:25-26

A different experience I had in Ethiopia was during our visit to Catalam Mariam, a pilgrimage site on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, where people go for Holy Water, to drink it, and to be washed with it. It's somewhat similar to going to Lourdes in France or Walsingham in Norfolk. People go there to seek healing or spiritual comfort. One of the young women joining us from Bole (a posh, affluent area of Addis Ababa) casually remarked that she “didn't like poor people.” I guess she probably meant she didn't like being confronted with the many people living in poverty in Addis Ababa. Yet, I was slightly shocked by this remark. But when we arrived at Catalam Mariam and waited while our friend went for the Holy Water, we were sitting next to the sweetest ‘poor’ young girl I had ever met. She had a withered hand and spoke with a soft, friendly voice. She was there with her mum, and as we sat closely together, this poor girl, so rich in gentleness, touched the heart of the wealthier girl from Bole (and also mine), an encounter that broke down barriers. It was not some kind of negative compassion towards the girl's disability, but it was the deep gentleness of the young girl that touched

us. I think that even though the wealthier girl from Bole didn't take the Holy Water that day, something had already changed in her just by having that encounter.

And that is what holy places can do when we go into the silence or meet other people. It is as if all the prayers said in those places penetrate the soil, rocks, and air. It becomes one of those places we call ‘thin places’, where the distance between heaven and earth just feels a little thinner. Some older churches have that too. They are places that lead to an encounter either with the Divine around us or the Divine within us. A part of our journey into the silence, or travelling towards a place with Holy Water, is preparing ourselves (like fasting), waiting, and expecting something holy. When I go to my silent place in Crawley Down, the journey starts in the heart of busy London, and from the final bus stop to the monastery, it takes a twenty-minute walk through a wood. This journey is part of the whole spiritual experience for me. For people living in communities, like the Catholic Workers, taking time out is fundamental to the functioning of a community. Not taking serious breaks when you need them, having to do everything yourself, thinking people need you, Dorothy Day sees as a risk of pride! “There are times,” she writes, “when one's generosity is a mask for one's pride: what

will ‘they’ do without me...?” In *The Duty of Delight*, she writes, “I need to overcome a sense of my own importance, my own failure, and an impatience to deal with myself and others that goes with it.”

Taking time off for families with young children or responsibilities for the elderly isn't always easy. But we can build silent moments and helpful rituals into our daily lives, like saying grace before eating, praying before sleeping, and having a quiet corner in your flat. On Sunday, on our way to church, it can be a journey towards inner silence. I know one Ethiopian father who goes to church with his children on Saturday, and on Sunday, he goes on his own, so he has time for his own prayers.



Flower, Moya Barnett, 2025

A little ritual in the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which always helps me a little bit, is that on entering the church, you have to take off your

shoes. “Take off your sandals”, leave behind the dirt and worries of the world, “for the place you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5). Ultimately, for the wellbeing of others and ourselves, we need to make time for God.

Br Johannes Maertens

Tea, Coffee, Cocoa

Thomas Frost reflects on the humility of true service

For a long while now, I've spent a few hours every couple of weeks giving out food with a few different organisations. On a recent shift I saw something unusual: in the long queue were a couple of families with children. The temperature was close to freezing and children were standing with their parents on a dark pavement next to a busy road junction so that they could get a hot meal. I was distressed by the fact that children have to do such a thing in a wealthy country, and maybe more so by the thought of their parents having to explain it to them. I have seen worse things, but this upset me because it was something new and I am not yet used to it. It reminded me of how I felt when I started doing this sort of work, and, for the first time in my relatively sheltered life, coming into contact with human need so directly. Not that the first few times were particularly emotionally difficult – serving a long, fast-moving, and sometimes impatient queue from tables set up on a pavement is exciting, and I imagine excitement will be the dominant emotion for most people at first.

The difficult thing is not that visitors come, but that they keep coming. It is not difficult to serve at a soup run just once, because that first time you are thinking only in terms of the immediate need you are resolving: the people in front of you need food, and you are giving it to them. What is difficult is serving the same queue week after week, with many faces becoming familiar, and starting to think of hunger itself as a continuous problem, persisting over time, which you are unable to resolve. In this sense it does not matter that you are giving out food now – the hunger will still be there next week. This is easy to understand in the abstract, but harder to take when it is your own work being flung against the intractable problem, and those affected are in front of you.

We all want power. The least of us are not very different from the great in this way. Parents want the power to feed their children, the hungry want the power to feed themselves, politicians want the power to enrich or aggrandise themselves. People who perform the works of mercy generally want the power to relieve the need they see. I would like to be able to resolve the problem of poverty by waving my hand. I wonder whether I am more distressed by seeing the suffering of others or by the consciousness of my impotence to resolve it. This is a sort of arrogance which is perhaps difficult to distinguish from altruism, and ironically is likely to reduce our usefulness still further. The people I want to help are often able to do far more for each other than I do for them. I have seen people in precarious situations, with very little energy to spare, devote all of it to helping the people around them, and doing so very effectively because, sharing similar experiences, they know what they need. Usually, the most useful role those of us who are relatively privileged can perform from outside is to facilitate solidarity without imposing ourselves too much, but the more obsessed we are with the restrictions on our own agency the more we'll struggle to do so.

Over the course of a cold winter, we have seen this tendency play out lethally in London through the disorganisation of council-provided “severe weather emergency protocol” (SWEP) shelters. Beds have remained unoccupied while people have remained outside in the freezing cold because councils have insisted on assigning beds through their own small internal referral teams rather than utilising the knowledge of the many dedicated grassroots organisations, which know who needs shelter and where they are, to say nothing of the experience of rough sleepers themselves, who of course know perfectly well that they need to be

indoors on freezing nights. The desire to be the one to solve the problem and the concomitant desire for control are temptations which run right through all charities, from professionalised institutions down to small volunteer-organised teams, and is probably a large part of why 'charity' has acquired such a bad name. I expect that we have all done some sort of harm, to some extent, for these reasons.

These reflections make me more and more convinced of the importance of humility, which used to be regarded by Christians as a great virtue. The word comes from the Latin *humilitas*, derived from *humilis*, the quality of lowness, itself derived from *humus*, meaning 'earth', giving the word the additional sense of 'groundedness'. One who is humble is close to the earth, and thus aware of their limitations as an earthly creature. Reflecting on my limitations is a great consolation because, without reducing my motivation to do what I can to work against problems, it undercuts the sense of frustrated omnipotence which makes me want to eliminate them all myself. It also helps me to serve those I serve in a more practical way, by keeping me conscious of the limitations of my experience and the need to defer to those who have more of it.

Humility will help us to avoid doing harm when we think we are doing good.

If we lived in a sane society humility would be regarded as an indispensable virtue in private and public life; it would be taught in schools and there would be a general understanding that the lack of it is both unhealthy and actively dangerous. Of course this will not happen, and of course in my own life I will not succeed in cultivating it as much as I should. But I can work on it. We at least have the advantage of the example of the Cross, on which Jesus exhibited perfect humility, taking on the maximum possible degree of limitation and accepting it, and thus saved the world. We also have the ministry of Mary, who understood and accepted the divine will when nobody else did, because she was uniquely willing to accept just the role she was given in it, and, because of this, received as a spear through her own heart the crucifixion of her son. She was able to participate in the greatest of all human actions just because of her humility. We cannot hope for anything more.

Thomas Frost



The Christ of the Breadlines, Franz Eichenberg, 1952

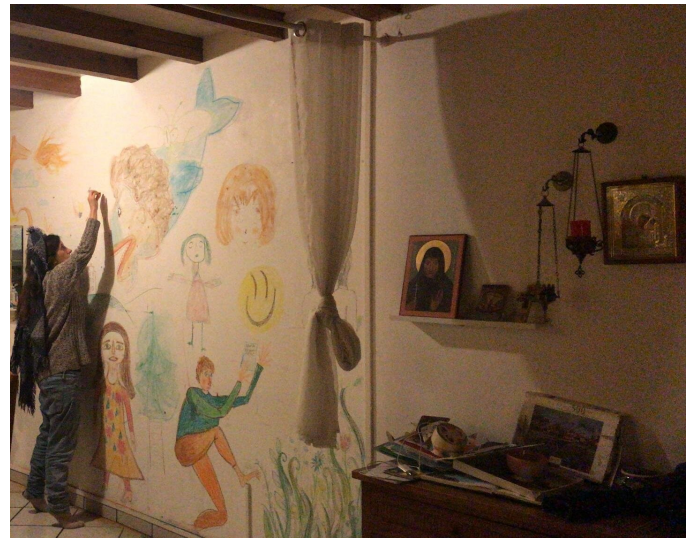
Solidarity and Racial Justice

Moya Barnett recalls her time in Calais among the refugees at Maria Skobtsova House

From September to December 2024 I was in Calais, at Maria Skobtsova House, a house of hospitality for the most vulnerable refugee women and children on the move. It was a difficult and deeply scarring experience; living in solidarity with and opening myself up to love for these women also meant experiencing great pain due to the hardships in their lives. All of the women and children I met had experienced police brutality and were continuing to experience it as they went out to attempt to cross the Channel. Many had also been victims of exploitation, extortion and violence from the smugglers as well as from the state. One woman had lost a baby due to the conditions in the camps, immediately before she had come to our house. She announced this at the dinner table one day out of the blue and then moved on to doing the dishes.

Our role wasn't to save these women but to create a space where they could share these experiences. Through sharing, they were able to process some of the trauma and work past it. Often the most crucial time to be a compassionate listener was the early hours of the morning when people would troop back in, having survived a shipwreck or an attack by the police and all they wanted was to eat, tell about it and go to bed. The first time it was told was serious, but by the time they woke up again, it was something that could be laughed about. Paul in Galatians 6:2 urges us to "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." But it is not an easy task.

It is also a struggle to break down your expectations, cultural norms and the power dynamic which exists between those with papers and those without. While living together, cooking, eating, dancing and watching children nothing separates us, but there will always be moments when the power dynamics become clear; deciding who



Maria Skobtsova House, refugeehousecalais.org (CC)

can enter the house, distributing scarce resources, mediating others' conflicts and, of course, when it comes time for volunteers to leave, often taking an easy ferry across the same water which has caused these women so much hardship. Not acknowledging this power imbalance causes more harm than good.

As a volunteer sometimes it is difficult to even recognise when people are simply agreeing with you, acquiescing to your requests, because they see you as someone who has power over them. I experienced this as a white child in rural Zimbabwe, when seeing some adult men taking the girls' netball ball to use for football, I stormed over and demanded it back. I was fired by righteous anger; this was a ball for the girls and the men had used their age and gender to take it from them, but they had given it to me, not because I was right, but because I was white. The girls, my classmates, were not overjoyed that I had spoken on their behalf. Reflecting on this experience as an adult I resolved to take more time to think before acting. Am I speaking for a community I am not part of? Am I fully conscious of the power dynamics in this situation? Is everyone involved informed of all the facts so they can make

their own decisions and have agency? Am I the right person to be taking action in this circumstance?

I often had to do this introspective work in Calais, particularly when mediating racial conflicts. With large groups of people living in small spaces, conflict inevitably arises. At one point, the house was split between Arab and East African women. A small conflict had started, between two people, but due to their not talking to each other directly it had ballooned to involve all of the people living in the house and to include tirades about the cultures and religiosity of the people involved. We had a few talks with people directly but no one was opening up. As volunteers, we had to step back, reflect and ensure that how we approached this conflict didn't, in fact, reinforce harmful dynamics. We decided to take an informal, communal approach; remaining at the table after dinner and using non-violent communication techniques so that everyone had an opportunity to speak and be heard. It is a strange position, as a white person, to be mediating a racial conflict, but being outsiders gave us an advantage. While we lived there, were known and trusted, we also were not weighted to one side or the other.



Bottom Left: *Community Life*, refugeehousecalais.org & Top Right: *Testimony*, refugeehousecalais.org (CC)



In the end, as one woman said “We are all refugees, no one is better than the other.” And there were huge acts of kindness, love and solidarity between people of all backgrounds. It is easy to see yourself as a saviour in these situations, to want people to need you. But what I saw was that, no matter what we did, the greatest acts of kindness came from refugee to refugee. And to love someone fully, to be in solidarity with them I couldn't be a saviour, however tempting. I couldn't wrap people in my love and keep them safe from everything. In the end, part of fully loving someone is giving them agency to leave and to make decisions which may put them in danger.

Anti-racism is an ongoing process, as Dom Hélder Câmara said “We are all called to build a world of peace, but we must also build a world of justice, for one cannot exist without the other.” True justice requires that we look to the root causes of these problems, that we truly love our neighbours and oppose inequality and oppression wherever we encounter it. An impossible task, but as I was told in Calais: “We do what we can and the rest is on God.”

Moya Barnett

Safeguarding Love

Thomas Dennehy-Caddick on the unbearable lightness of being terminally ill today

Since Keir Starmer took control of the Labour Party, I've found myself questioning my previous fealty to the Labour Party and the British State. Despite longstanding abstract commitments to mutualism and critiques of the modern nation-state, in practice, I became a Labour member and regular voter, who obsessed about parliamentary politics to an unhealthy degree. I can at least thank Sir Keir (and Dorothy Day) for helping to change that, with a spoilt ballot and membership card to show for it.

Despite serious misgivings about all recent Labour leaders, the selection of Starmer represented a new low. The 'electable Corbynism' sales pitch was a thin smokescreen for the party's evident pivot to liberalism. And while that word might not sound so bad, my issue with liberalism is its oftentimes relaxed attitude toward death, an uncomfortable stance for a pacifist like me. This death drive was already evident in Starmer's pre-leadership voting record, where he rebelled from his otherwise scrupulous party loyalty on both the failed 2014 'assisted dying' vote and the 2015 authorisation of air strikes against ISIL (a coalition campaign that claimed the lives of over ten thousand civilians). This liberalism has only grown more pronounced in his leadership, with Starmer supporting the genocide in Gaza and the recent passage of an 'assisted dying' bill.

Two obvious objections may be raised regarding my critique of the latter. The first is a technocratic defence: Starmer was not directly responsible for the 'assisted dying' bill since it was a private member's bill and MPs had a free vote. However, Starmer promised the parliamentary vote before the election, and it was his newly selected MPs who voted it through. Over two-thirds of Starmer's 2024 cohort voted in favour of it, while a majority of the old guard voted against



Image: Frances Margaret Taylor depicted when a volunteer nurse with Florence Nightingale in 1854

it. The uniformly pro-euthanasia press conveniently ignored this, preferring to portray the result as a product of perfected parliamentary democracy rather than the outcome of Starmer's pre-election purge of the Corbynite left, who overwhelmingly voted against the bill.

The second objection is that it is simply right to 'give dying people ... choice, autonomy and dignity at the end of their lives'. Of course, it is impossible to object to this framing of Kim Leadbeater, since it doesn't actually say anything. In the abstract, most people would want to grant anyone "choice, autonomy and dignity", which all sounds very appealing. However, what the bill's advocates obfuscate is its concrete proposal: it would offer sick adults with a life expectancy below six months State assistance to end their lives via lethal injection without even informing their families. There are, of course, countless objections to this proposal, with regards to safeguarding risks, diagnostic limitations, corruption of the patient-doctor relationship, lack of conscience clauses, the

legislative expansion, the lack of palliative care, the coercion of skyrocketing inequality, etc. However, the key issue is that to think even for a moment that some lives aren't worth living is to have already lost sight of everything that matters. It reminds me of Elizabeth Anscombe's rebuke of consequentialist moral speculation: "[I]f someone really thinks, in advance, that it is open to question whether such an action as procuring the judicial execution of the innocent should be quite excluded from consideration—I do not want to argue with him: he shows a corrupt mind." And while thinking that some people are better off dead for whatever reason is certainly corrupt, it is infinitely more corrupting for society to tell the terminally ill, who are always prone to feeling a burden, that this is likely true of them. We must reject thinking along these lines, which can only lead to a dead end.

But what are we to do about all this then? Does this mean we need to double down on our engagement with parliamentary politics? If, by that, we mean voting, I cannot see the point: Labour, Lib Dems, Greens, and Reform all voted for the bill, whilst the Conservative PM, Sunak, publicly advocated for assisted suicide in the run-up to the election. So, as is the norm, there was not a life-friendly option to choose from. If, by engagement, we mean lobbying MPs ahead of the third reading, I might give a qualified yes. After all, I myself wrote to my Haringey MP, Catherine West, before the second reading, calling on her as a practising Quaker to take a pacifist stance and oppose both assisted suicide and the Gaza genocide. Of course, as expected, this well-known 'Labour for Israel' liberal ignored my email and voted for the bill, but it was still reasonable to reach out. My main qualification, though, does not stem from my absent hope that the bill will pass its third and final reading, despite the recent controversial dilutions of safeguards by the scrutiny committee, but rather because the minutiae of parliamentary politics distracts us from the real labour of safeguarding life. When the bill, or its future equivalent, does pass, the only

protection terminally ill people will have left is the conviction that their life is worth living, and it is the collective erosion of this conviction in our atomised, 'throwaway society' that has brought us to this nadir.

Since my wife and I moved from the London Catholic Worker to Brentford late last year, prior to the birth of our first child, Silas, we have been privileged to peer into an image of an altogether different society. On Sundays, we walk a short distance from our house to attend Mass at St Mary's Convent, the mother house of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God, which was founded by Venerable Frances Margaret Taylor, who heroically dedicated her life to care and advocacy for the poor and sick.

On one side of the chapel, there, sit the very infirm residents of the in-house Maryville Care Home, and on the other side sit the residents of the attached St Raphael's Home for adults with learning disabilities, many with conditions which meet the current criteria for late-term abortion, such as Down's Syndrome (91% of diagnoses lead to termination). Throughout the Mass, there is a hum of activity as the Poor Servants sisters quietly move about the room helping the residents: giving them water, wiping their faces, adjusting their clothes, moving their wheelchairs, distributing Communion, etc. But the real power of the experience lies in the evident tenderness of each interaction. The unforced love that the sisters exhibit for their profoundly dependent community residents stands as a countersign to a culture that insists that we stop "prolonging human life way past human usefulness" (to quote the useless commentary of Matthew Parris).

Ultimately, then, I believe with Dorothy Day that it is only in the 'scandal' of the works of mercy and the labour of love that we can begin to turn the tide on our culture of death.

Tom Dennehy-Caddick

A Deadly Ceasefire

Rose Chacko picks through the rubble of a broken ceasefire agreement in the Holy Land

With the ceasefire called in Gaza, much of the world breathed a sigh of relief. However, it was short-lived, as Israel immediately ramped up its violence in the West Bank.

Moreover, Israel has not kept to the ceasefire agreement. It has only allowed 10% of the tents it promised to allow into Gaza under the terms of the agreement, it has not allowed heavy machinery in to clear the rubble, and it has not allowed mobile homes in. This has hindered efforts to clear rubble, search for the missing and recover the bodies of thousands of victims still trapped.

Israel has also killed 118 Palestinians in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect. Were it 118 Israelis killed – would this be seeing more outrage in Western media? Would it be perceived as a violation of the ceasefire?

Many Palestinian captives released have been frail and suffering from infectious skin diseases like scabies, fractures and trauma due to torture. But it was three gaunt Israeli soldiers who provoked Donald Trump to threaten to “unleash hell” on Gaza (as if hell hadn’t already been unleashed). The outrage seemed strange, as the US hadn’t put any pressure on Israel to revoke its policy of mass starvation in Gaza over the last year.

Meanwhile in the West Bank, 40,000 Palestinians have been expelled from their homes in the operation “Iron Wall” which Israel unleashed as soon as the Gaza ceasefire began. Israel has emptied four refugee camps in the northern occupied West Bank – Tulkarm, Nur Shams, Jenin and El Fara’a.

Palestinian analysts say Israel’s agenda is to erase the refugee camps as “Symbols of Return” for their inhabitants. This is also behind Israel’s attacks on UNRWA, which has represented a register for the Palestinian

refugees since 1948, and ensured their refugee status is passed down the generations. Israel wants them stateless, and for them to be forced to relinquish their claim to the Right of Return. An inalienable right, according to international law.

All in all, the situation looks the bleakest it has ever looked in my lifetime. But it also looks the clearest it has ever looked, and more people are engaging than I have ever seen, and both of these things may be a blessing, if we harness them.

I saw a Palestinian from Bil’in village in the West Bank speak last week in Gloucester – Iyad Burnat. Someone asked how he could remain so calm in the face of such relentless violence (three of his sons had spent time in Israeli prisons, and all of them had suffered serious injuries due to attacks by soldiers). He said “I have hope that the occupation will end tomorrow. Not next week – tomorrow”. It made me think of this prayer which I read in my Magnificat in January, which I keep rereading:

“May the God of hope bring us such joy and peace in our faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove all bounds to hope. Amen” (Romans 15:13)

Rose Chacko



Hope, Moya Barnett, 2025

Inventory: Trees of Knowledge

Anthony V. Capildeo OPL is a Trinidadian Scottish writer of poetry and non-fiction. Recent work includes Polkadot Wounds (Carcanet, 2024), and an essay series on touch and mourning. They are Writer in Residence at the University of York.

The guava tree was cut down
It was better to install water storage tanks
The orange tree was cut down
It could not be disentangled from a vine
The cherry tree, its neighbour, was cut down
Perhaps a similar vine had spread to it
The plum tree was cut down
Its boughs overhung the drain
The banana trees were cut down
The trash at their roots attracts snakes
The ginger lilies also were cut down
The lushness of their leaves attracting snakes
The sapodilla tree was cut down
Although it was fruitful, even joyful
The white violet was transplanted
Its velvet passed away in sandy soil
The miniature rose was left unwatered
It, and its flame-to-white buds, withered
The pomegranate tree was cut down
Also fiery, and fruitful – Why?
The entanglement of our thought with trees!
Mortal, do you remember you are human?
I do not know why it was cut down
The pomegranate tree that near kissed my window



Tree of Knowledge, Ramon Llull, 1296

Anthony V. Capildeo

From the Archives

Dorothy Day's beautiful meditation on love from 'On Pilgrimage', April 1948

Whenver I groan within myself and think how hard it is to keep writing about love in these times of tension and strife which may at any moment become for us all a time of terror, I think to myself, "What else is the world interested in? What else do we all want, each one of us, except to love and be loved, in our families, in our work, in all our relationships. God is Love. Love casts out fear. Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the money changers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love, to stand in that relationship with each other of love. We want with all our hearts to love, to be loved. And not just in the family but to look upon all as our mothers, sisters, brothers, children. It is when we love the most intensely and most humanly, that we can recognize how tepid is our love for others. The keenness and intensity of love brings with it suffering, of course, but joy too because it is a foretaste of heaven.

A Journey North

Paul McGrail discusses his community's recent relocation to Merseyside

In the spring of 2020, the initial Covid-19 measures meant that most guests of Giuseppe Conlon House were moved into hotel accommodation if no alternative was available to them. During this time, I accepted a gracious offer from the Methodist minister and activist, Dan Woodhouse, to join him living at his manse in Brighton, East Sussex. Nora and Sam Ziegler also moved from GCH into this little community around that time.

During the next four and a half years, we became involved in projects relating to assistance for asylum seekers, feminism and transgender rights, support and maintenance in our local church, union organising, housing hospitality and outreach work. Much of this engagement was inspired by the writings and lives of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, and the fellowship contained in the Catholic Worker movement.

An aspiration that Dan and Nora envisaged was the acquisition of a medium-sized Brighton hotel (many were available for purchase) and its conversion into affordable accommodation for low-income residents and a day centre for the city's homeless. Additionally, space would be made available for study groups and community organisations.

On the Sunday following the death of Queen Elizabeth, Dan, a republican, did not lead prayers for the royal family, but gave space for members of his congregation to do so. This minor, dignified action was seen by a small number of people as offensive. Their objections eventually led to a prolonged controversy and much duress for Dan.

Fortunately, Dan and the community accepted a kind and generous relocation to the Wirral, west of Liverpool, where Dan is currently minister to five churches. The

reception given to us was warm and enthusiastic in every possible way. We now live together in a large home we have designated Rimoine House, in memory of a beloved and much-missed brother of our family who died suddenly and tragically young. Often a victim of petty and bureaucratic discrimination, Rimoine, throughout his life, was a stoic and joyful companion to family and comrades. May he find eternal love.

We are now six people sharing a corner house with two rooms set aside for either visitors or emergency housing. We attend different churches and pursue various interests. We have had visitors stay on many occasions and welcome guests from the Catholic Worker communities.

Dan devotes his energy to ministering to his churches; Nora is editor of *Bad Apple*, an interfaith anarchist quarterly, as well as compiling interviews and research into the life experience at Giuseppe Conlon House. She also works with the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and is studying to be a lay preacher. Andy is involved in fundraising at a local church popular with youth and those with special needs. Rob is a volunteer gardener at Birkenhead Park while applying for full-time employment. Sam is exploring becoming a youth football coach, and I continue my studies into twenty-first-century Christianity.

As a community, we gather each weekday morning for prayer. Cooking and cleaning are shared, we make decisions together in weekly house meetings, and we sit together for dinner Monday through Friday.

Often in conversation, we recall with great affection those who came in the evenings as local volunteers to prepare communal suppers at Giuseppe Conlon House.



Christ in Emmaus, Albrecht Dürer, 1510

Residents and visitors shared good cheer and fellowship over delicious dinners prepared with real TLC. We were introduced to new dishes ranging from spicy jollof rice to Korean fish pancakes. Meals were followed by varied discussions. A monthly visit by Bruce Kent invariably produced lively discourse and amicable sharp repartee.

We receive the London Catholic Worker newsletter and greatly value the work at Giuseppe Conlon House. Like all who have seen for themselves the dedication and service provided to those lacking resources, we pray that Giuseppe Conlon House continues as a shining example of charity and hospitality to those in dire need of assistance.

I'll close with a passage from *The Long Loneliness*: "But the final word is love... We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know him in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship. We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community. It all happened while we sat there talking, and it is still going on."

Dedicated to the memory of Edwin Kalerwa, Pilgrim.

Paul McGrail

The Catholic Worker in the UK

London CW: Giuseppe Conlon House, 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1BG ; Tel: 020 8348 8212; Email: londoncatholicworker@yahoo.co.uk ; Web: www.londoncatholicworker.org & giuseppeconlonhouse.org ;
At Giuseppe Conlon House we run a house of hospitality for homeless and destitute asylum seekers who are not allowed to work or claim benefits, and organize acts of prayer, witness and nonviolent resistance.

The Catholic Worker Farm: Lynsters Farm, Old Uxbridge Road, West Hyde, Herts, WD3 9XJ ; Tel: 0923 777 201 ; Email: thecatholicworkerfarm@yahoo.co.uk ; Web: www.thecatholicworkerfarm.org
The Farmhouse offers hospitality, accommodation and support to destitute women and children, and have a poustinia and hermitage retreat.

Glasgow Catholic Worker: Email: glw@catholicworker.org.uk ; Web: www.catholicworker.org.uk *The Glasgow Catholic Worker offers a place of welcome for asylum seekers and destitute refugees in the centre of Glasgow at the Garnethill Multicultural Centre, open Sat 9:00 – 1:00. and a soup kitchen on Friday nights. We keep a regular vigil at Faslane Nuclear Base as well as having monthly meetings and prayers.*

Rimoaine House: The Wirral, Merseyside; Tel: 0151 953 0220 ; Email: rimoainehouse@yahoo.com
Rimoaine House is a community house practicing mutual aid and hospitality. As a house we are supported by and involved in the Methodist Church. We are friends of the Catholic Worker movement and would love to be in touch with anyone in our area interested in hospitality, faith and social justice.

When you have finished with this newsletter, please pass it to others!

Giuseppe Conlon House Wishlist

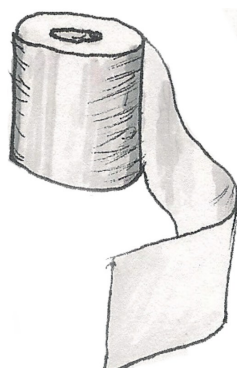
FOOD

Chopped tomatoes
Peanut butter
Cooking oil
Kidney beans
Lentils
Chickpeas
Oats
Noodles
White vinegar
Hummus
Soy sauce
Spices & herbs
Honey
Cereal
Juice and squash
Herbal teabags
Chilli sauce
Nuts and seeds



TOILETRIES

Toilet paper
Toothbrushes
Toothpaste
Deodorant
Shampoo
Liquid soap
Razors



CLEANING

Eco-friendly products
Anti-bacterial spray
Bicarbonate of soda
Multi-purpose cleaner
Toilet cleaner
Laundry detergent
Floor cleaner



SUPPORT OUR WORK

At Giuseppe Conlon House we run a house of hospitality for destitute asylum seekers unable to work or claim benefits. We are a part of the radical, Christian, pacifist Catholic Worker movement started in 1933 in New York by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. For more information visit: www.catholicworker.com.

DONATIONS WELCOME!

We are not paid for this work. We receive nothing from the government. We rely on our readers' donations to pay bills, volunteer and guest expenses, building repairs, printing, and household supplies.

WAYS TO DONATE

Online banking: Giuseppe Conlon House CIO, CAF Bank, Account No: 00101805, Sort Code: 40-52-40

or

London Catholic Worker, Triodos Bank, Account No: 20066996, Sort Code: 16-58-10.

Paypal: visit our home page www.londoncatholicworker.org

Standing Order: to arrange a standing order use the adjacent form on the left.

Cheque: send cheques payable to 'London Catholic Worker', to 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1BG

Please do not donate pork products! Many of our guests do not eat pork for religious reasons. Also, please do not donate tinned spaghetti or baked beans as we already have enough.

Standing Order Form <small>Please use block letters</small>	
I wish to pay the London Catholic Worker £10/ £20/£40/other amount <input type="text"/> per month/ other <input type="text"/>	
Payments to be made monthly/ other First Payment to be made on: <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> / 14 and monthly thereafter	
Name of your bank	<input type="text"/>
Address of your bank	<input type="text"/>
Your account name	<input type="text"/>
Your account number	<input type="text"/>
Your bank sort code	<input type="text"/>
Please pay:	For the Credit of: London Catholic Worker
Triodos Bank	Account Number 20066996
Deanery Road	Sort Code: 16 58 10
Bristol BS1 5AS	Until further notice the sum of the value indicated above
Signed	Date
Your email address:	Your Name and Address
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Please return to :	
London Catholic Worker	
49 Mattison Road	
London N4 1BG	