

PARISH AGM, SUNDAY, 19TH MARCH 2017

Fr Paul writes:

The other Sunday we held the Parish AGM, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those of you who generously found the time to support this occasion. I take this as a way of saying that the parish is important to you, and I am grateful for that gesture.

We opened with talks from Aidan Cantwell and Anna Pincus, who both spoke about different aspects of the refugee crisis. Aidan began by showing a film made by the UNHCR. It presented statistics about the international situation, accompanied by images which were as disturbing as the figures. We heard that over 65 million people were displaced in 2015, more than the population of France. This amounts to nearly 1% of the world's population. Most are in the Middle East and Africa, and 90% live in a poor country. Most refugees in the world, those who have crossed an international border, come from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia, all countries with a long history of extreme violence. The majority of these are women and children, and among them there are about 100,000 unaccompanied children. (Do please find a link to the film on the parish web site.) Aidan then spoke about the part the diocese is playing in helping to resettle Syrian families. (Most of these are in towns along the south coast, but there are several families living in towns local to us.) Anna spoke about immigration detention and the role of the Gatwick Visitors' Group, who try to support them. She explained how detainees are kept in conditions like those of a prison, but, because detention is indefinite, it is therefore much worse than a prison sentence. Not knowing how long it will last leads to real mental illness, and sometimes detainees are released directly into mental hospitals. (Do please take this opportunity to write to your MP to draw their attention to this. You might remind them that those who are detained by police because they are suspected of a terrorist offence may only be held for fourteen days, yet those detained by immigration, without committing any offence, may be held indefinitely.) Anna then spoke about the work of Refugees Welcome - Crawley, serving local refugee families. In all these organisations we can play our part of service.

We then heard a presentation by Christina Fitzsimons and Paddy Hall and Theresa Hobson Frohock about the CAFOD initiative, *Livesimply*.

Christina writes: CAFOD set up the *Livesimply* initiative a few years ago and it has gained impetus from Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si*, which calls on us all to care for our common home.

Livesimply has three main strands: Live Simply, Live Sustainably, Live in solidarity with the Poor. It is a call to faith in action. The first strand – Live Simply – invites us to a better appreciation of what we have and to be educated and responsible consumers, thinking about our buying choices and avoiding waste and harm to others through our choices. The second strand – Live Sustainably – invites us to look at how we care for the environment and how we might do more to preserve it. The third strand – live in solidarity with the poor – is a call to help those in need as much as possible. The scheme starts by asking the parish to record what it already does under these headings. It then asks for new initiatives to supplement what the parish is already doing. (Here we remembered that we are already involved in many activities which fall into these strands – working with refugees, those in detention and those living locally, and supporting our friendship parish in Irundu, the lunches in the Friary, Crawley, and the Interfaith Forum.)

I would like to thank Christina, Paddy and Theresa very much for the work which they are doing for us. It is my vision for the parish that we should become a Christian community which is truly at the service of our society, and most especially of those who are in greatest need. My hope is that by adopting the *Livesimply* initiative we will find a sharper focus for our pastoral work, and one which will unite all our various activities. I believe that this is the kind of Church which Pope Francis wants. In his great encyclical, *Laudato Si*, he shows how work for ecology and work for the poor are always closely linked. He writes : *The gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poor...A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach...so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.* (#48 & 49) Elsewhere he writes : *The poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel...there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor.* (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #48.) The poor and excluded can help us understand the Gospel better!

Livesimply Prayer

Compassionate and loving God,
you created the world for us all to share,
a world of beauty and plenty.
Create in us a desire to live simply,
so that our lives may reflect your generosity.

Creator God,
you gave us responsibility for the earth,
a world of riches and delight.
Create in us a desire to live sustainably,
so that those who follow after us
may enjoy the fruits of your creation.

God of peace and justice,
you give us the capacity to change,
to bring about a world that mirrors your wisdom.
Create in us a desire to act in solidarity,
so that the pillars of injustice crumble
and those now crushed are set free.
Amen (copyright Linda Jones/CAFOD)