



Pax Scotia

Issue 50

Contents:

Page 2: Victoria Firth of JRS UK reflects on the refugee crisis

Page 3: June Graham explores post suicide bereavement

Page 4: Anna Blackman introduces our online book project



Peace allows development for people & planet

Ben Wilson PhD is Director of Public Engagement for SCIAF, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, responsible for fundraising, community engagement, development education, communications and political advocacy. He is a trustee of Scotland's International Development Alliance and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, & was a member of the Holy See delegation to COP28.

In 2023, in a village in the south of Malawi, I met a woman called Sofia, whose life had been completely turned upside down by climate change. In 2015, Sofia and her neighbours had been rehomed up river, due to torrential rains and flooding. In Malawi, people are deeply connected to the land. The land is their home, their identity, their inheritance and vital to binding the community together. When they had to flee their home in 2015, it caused heartache for the whole village.

When I spoke with Sofia in 2023, she was living in a metal temporary shelter. Her village had been hit by Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019, and again in 2022 by Cyclones Ana and Gombe, which destroyed her home. Nine months later, she was still living in temporary accommodation with about 20 other women and children, while her husband was housed elsewhere with other displaced men. Torn from her family land, separated from her loved ones, and living in a divided village cut in two by a seasonal river, Sofia's life had been turned upside down.

People often ask why SCIAF, which works on poverty and social justice, focuses on climate change. For many, climate change is about recycling, public transport, and perhaps eating less meat. Many think of the impact on polar bears, before they think of the impact on people.

It is for people like Sofia that SCIAF campaigns so much on this issue. Climate change disproportionately affects the poorest communities, who have contributed the least to the problem but suffer the most. These populations, already vulnerable to poverty, hunger, and inequality, are the first to feel the impact of rising temperatures, unpredictable weather, and natural disasters. Climate change threatens

to undo decades of progress in areas like health, education, and economic stability.

Beyond its impact on development, climate change also poses a significant threat to global peace. Climate change acts as a "risk multiplier" of conflicts, exacerbating underlying vulnerabilities and deepening existing grievances. In places such as Ethiopia, Sudan and Syria, resource scarcity and increased competition for water and arable land has further precipitated simmering tensions bubbling over into violence. By 2050, the IEP predicts 1.2 billion people could be displaced globally due to climate change. This will only increase the potential for violence to erupt, and deepen the vicious cycle whereby spiralling instability hinders the potential of countries to implement climate solutions.

For many decades, Pax Christi has brought the message to the world that without peace, we have nothing. Without peace there can be no "development"; without peace, there can be no human rights. Without peace, people will never have a world where they can fulfil their full potential. One must only look at Gaza to see the devastation brought by the horrors of war, which can put efforts towards integral human development back to ground zero.

Just as peace is a fundamental prerequisite for development, so too is the care of our planet. Without a habitable environment, without the clean air we breathe and the natural resources we depend on, none of our efforts toward development, peace, and security will endure. In the face the looming threat of irredeemable environmental catastrophe, it is hard to stay hopeful, just as it was 60 years ago when the prospect of a nuclear war felt within touching distance. Yet just like all global threats and injustices, these interconnected crises thrive on apathy and despondency. Hard as it may be, we have a duty to continue raising our voices and keep building a better world day by day. *Ben Wilson*

<https://unfccc.int/news/conflict-and-climate>

<https://www.zurich.com/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>



Victoria Firth is Senior Communications and Engagement Officer at JRS UK, where she leads on communication and outreach to supporters, parishes and schools. Here she reflects on the refugee crisis which led to a summer of violence in England, and for which the new Labour government seems not to have answers. Victoria offers the government the experience and wisdom of the Jesuit Refugee Service.

Together we can make history

We all want to live in safety. And, if this safety were ever threatened, we hope that others would stand in solidarity with us.

This summer, we were shocked by the criminal violence we saw across the country against people of colour, members of the Muslim community, and people seeking sanctuary. Following these attacks, people were left in fear and insecurity, having to make choices about whether it was safe to go about normal day to day activities.

This violence is the consequence of decades of hostile policies and dehumanising language used by our politicians and media to talk about people seeking safety.

It is important, therefore, that we continue to call for change, to create a society where people seeking to rebuild their lives can do so in safety. At JRS UK, we are calling for the new government to take three urgent actions:

1. Restore the right to asylum

Legislation such as the Nationality and Borders Act and the Illegal Migration Act punish refugees for how they travel and build long delays into the system. For the majority of people, there are no safe routes to seek protection here.

We are calling on the government to:

- * Create safe routes for people seeking asylum
- * Repeal the Illegal Migration Act and Nationality and Borders Act
- * Commit to examining each

asylum claim fairly on its merits

- * Abandon all measures that punish refugees for how they travel

2. End immigration detention

Every year, thousands of people are incarcerated without time limit in prison-like conditions for the purpose of administering immigration procedures (such as processing someone's asylum claim). Detention is a profoundly traumatic experience causing long-term harm.

We're calling on the government to:

- * End detention – or until this is achieved, implement a time limit of 28 days
- * Learn from pilot projects that have supported people seeking sanctuary through their applications in community settings

3. End the hostile environment

The hostile (or 'compliant') environment prevents many people from accessing basic services on the basis of their immigration status. This can leave people completely destitute, left vulnerable to exploitation, and unable to seek refuge from abuse.

JRS UK works with people who came here for safety but were wrongly refused asylum and made destitute for decades, before finally being recognised as having a need for asylum all along.

We're calling on the government to:

- * Implement the learnings from the Windrush Scandal
- * Abolish the hostile environment and no recourse to public funds conditions
- * Work with local authorities on solutions to ensure access to support

for all, upholding everyone's fundamental rights

Whilst there have been some welcome policy changes under the new government (e.g. the scrapping of the Rwanda plan and the announcement that people would no longer be held on the Bibby Stockholm barge), there are many things that still need to change. As I write this, the news is covering stories of potential plans for offshore processing that are troubling.

The Church is clear in its call for us to welcome people seeking safety, and our duty to build a world where the gifts of all are celebrated.

We all have a part to play in showing solidarity with people seeking safety and affirming the dignity of our sisters and brothers. Whether it is calling for legislative change, having conversations with others, creating opportunities for encounter in our community groups and places of worship, or going out to stand in solidarity with others affected by violence - we can do better.

Thank you for walking with us.

Victoria Firth

JRS UK works with destitute asylum seekers who have no government support. Services include practical items such as food, clothes, and toiletries, as well as legal and casework support. JRS UK also runs projects aimed at building connections between people and communities across the country. To learn more, visit www.jrsuk.net



Seeking nonviolence in the wake of tragedy

June Graham is a Pax Christi Scotland member and campaigner, an author and a bilingual blogger. She received a Gaelic New Writers Award in 2019 from the Gaelic Books Council and Scottish Books Trust. She works at Commun na Gaidhlig in Stornoway as a part-time early years officer, organising Gaelic play sessions for wee ones. Here she reflects on suicide bereavement...



June Graham

When I joined Pax Christi Scotland around 2018, after the UK voted to renew Trident, I had some understanding that peace work includes inner work and isn't *just* about protesting huge, external injustices like nuclear weapons.

However, I had no inkling of the huge, ongoing challenge I would face after my sister Liz took her life in January 2019, leaving behind a husband and two children. Our lives were shattered and those close to her are struggling with ongoing mental and/or physical health problems.

Since Liz's death, I have experienced regular, often totally debilitating migraines. Meditation, including centering prayer, has become a necessity rather than, as before, something which helped me feel good and which I might fit in, given time.

After Liz died, I lived in a state of constant emotional numbness. My life was over, and I was just going through the motions knowing I had to keep going for my family's sake. When things got too much, I phoned the Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide helpline, which is staffed by volunteers who have themselves experienced suicide loss. This provided some emotional release as well as hope that life would become more manageable although I had no idea how.

Suicide is an act of violence which affects many more lives than the one it ends.

Where does this violence come from? Based on what happened to Liz and the stories I have heard from other bereaved people, I believe there is an incipient violence in our society which marginalises those who are different and unable to work, including those with mental health issues. Mental health services are in the frontline when it comes to funding cuts. The support Liz received towards the end of her life was much less substantial than that received at the start of her seven-year battle with post-natal psychosis. One message I feel that Liz's death is saying is, 'I am not the only one who was sick.'

When I first lost Liz, there was no suicide bereavement support group in the Western Isles. In 2020, a local man who had lost

his daughter Sarah to suicide founded Sarah's Sanctuary for those affected by suicide loss. Through hearing other people's stories and being able to talk about Liz and the circumstances leading up to her death, I have unfrozen and begun to feel things again.

The topic of stigma came up during our meetings, both the way others avoided us when we were recently bereaved by suicide, and the stigma which our loved ones experienced as they struggled with mental illness.

Earlier this year, our group was awarded arts funding by SeeMe Scotland to explore the stigma around suicide bereavement. We are working with Jane Harlington of Blue Pig Studio in Carloway to explore the theme of slipping through the net. Jane has challenged us to think about our loved ones. What led to them slipping through the support net? After they died, what were the helpful things which people said and what were the hurtful ones?

We hope that by breaking a taboo and speaking about suicide bereavement, we can help others who have suffered from suicide loss. By bringing the topic of suicide into the open, we hope that this may also create opportunities to prevent it.

Sarah's Sanctuary is aiming towards an exhibition in our local arts centre, An Lanntair, in November. In the meantime, we are blogging about the arts project at sarahsanctuarywesternisles.blogspot.com

June Graham

The Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide helpline is open daily 9 am - 7 pm. Phone 0300 111 5065

Samaritan Scotland has 19 branches from Scottish Borders to the Highlands and Islands, providing a vital lifeline for people and communities across the country. <https://www.samaritans.org/samaritans-in-scotland/>

June's blog is at: <https://junegram.wordpress.com/>

Our website

Blogs, podcasts, past and future events – these are all on our Pax Christi Scotland website. All newsletters are archived there. You can pay your annual membership fee on the Membership page and make donations. Please explore and share:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

<https://www.caledonianwebsites.com/>

Membership Reminder

Please pay **in November** on the **membership page of our website**, or, if you pay by online banking, please give your name to identify your payment. If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the address below, cheques payable to Pax Christi Scotland.

You can also make regular donations on our 'donate' page or by standing order - thank you.

Membership fees are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

<http://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

[https://www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland)

[PaxChristiScotland](#)

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Snail mail:

Pax Christi Scotland
c/o Xaverian Missionaries
Calder Avenue
Coatbridge ML5 4JS

YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

<https://www.youtube.com/>

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Click on the word 'Subscribed' and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

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Our book project: a preview

Anna Blackman is a Lecturer in Catholic Religious Education at the University of Glasgow. She has previously lectured at Roehampton, Durham, Newcastle, and Tubingen Universities, & worked as a Research Associate in Catholic social thought and practice at the Centre for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame. She serves on the Columban Missionaries in Britain's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Committee and co-chairs the Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church's roundtable on nonviolence and just peace. Anna also serves on the Education Committee for the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. She will lead our new book project (dates and links in October) & here introduces it...

In 2017, Pope Francis used his World Day of Peace Message to call on the Church to 'make active nonviolence our way of life',^[1] and assured 'the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence'.^[2] Whilst a commitment to nonviolence has continued to garner traction throughout the papacy of Pope Francis, building on a long, if not sometimes overlooked, tradition of peacebuilding and pacifism within the Church, much work still needs to be done on its Church-wide reception.^[3]

This has been the mission of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI) since its inception when it was launched at the [Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference](#) in Rome in April 2016, an event which was supported by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. As a project of Pax Christi International, [the CNI](#) 'affirms that active nonviolence is at the heart of the vision and message of Jesus' and aims to form a Church that 'will lead the world away from perpetual violence and war by expanding its investment in its intellectual, pastoral, academic, diplomatic and financial resources in developing and promoting nonviolent practices and strategies'. Key to this is promoting education within the Church 'about active nonviolence as a spirituality, a way of life, a universal ethic, and a practical and effective tool for building peace within families, local communities, nationally and globally'.

As part of the journey towards the realisation of a Church that teaches nonviolence, the CNI published [Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace within the Church and the World](#) in 2020. The text, the result of a three-year global consultation with activists, organisers, Church leaders, social scientists, and theologians, explores how the Church can return to the tradition of Gospel nonviolence and, in doing so, enrich the world. It surveys the scriptural, historical, and theological roots of nonviolence, intertwining these with lived experience and examples of nonviolent practice, and academic research on its effectivity, forming a foundational text for understanding both the tradition, practice, and implementation of nonviolence within the Church.

In November, Pax Christ Scotland will launch an online monthly reading group to study the text, which I am delighted to be able to lead. In each meeting, the text will be used to examine a particular theme within nonviolence and will blend together a presentation on each theme with participant discussion and Q&A. The course is totally free, costing only the cost of the book, though subsidies will be provided for those who need it, and will be suited for any level, whether a novice to nonviolence or a seasoned veteran. In our world of current conflict, and with the [Synod highlighting nonviolence](#) as an important issue to take forward.

Anna Blackman

[1] Pope Francis, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Celebration of the Fiftieth World Day of Peace, Vatican website, January 1, 2017, § 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html

[2] Francis, § 6.

[3] Gerald Schlabach, 'What It Will Take: Learning from Pope Francis's Peacebuilding Pedagogy,' Expositions 13, no. 2 (2019): 138.