

CHURCH ACTION ON POVERTY NORTH EAST



**October 2017 – February
2019**

The North East in a Different Light

Introduction

You'll see from what follows that Church Action on Poverty North East's (CAPNE's) members have not been idle during the last year. This is hardly surprising, given the present state of our society. Several members met Philip Alston, the United Nations' Rapporteur on extreme poverty, at the Cedarwood Trust, in Meadow Well, North Shields, in November. We heard about the iniquitous way in which a man with learning difficulties had been treated by the Department for work and Pensions, being repeatedly sanctioned for not doing what he could not do, and thereby losing his income for weeks at a time. We heard about the person who has to hold down five jobs to keep body and soul together. We heard about a young man who had had a kidney removed being forced back to work far too soon, with dire consequences for his health. We heard that since 2011 all eighteen Council-funded youth worker posts in North Tyneside have been eliminated.

Philip Alston visited places in several parts of the country, and has since then presented a summary report, with a full one to follow in 2019. Needless to say, the Government disagreed with what he wrote.

According to St John's Gospel, Jesus said 'I have come that they may have life in all its fullness'; we're not there yet, but the likes of Philip Alston remind us that we must keep on aiming in that direction. There are too many of our sisters and brothers who are 'living and partly living' – if that.

If you would like to join us, at present we meet on the last Friday of most months at 2.00 pm in the hall attached to St Lawrence's RC Church, Byker Crescent, Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2JT (it's behind the 'Byker Wall').

David Peel, Chair, CAPNE

Advent Reflection Dec 2017

Our 2017 Advent Reflection took mental health as it's theme. We discussed the relationship between poverty and mental health. Bible stories such as that about the man possessed by evil spirits were briefly explored. Later in the day we were all given the opportunity to share something of our own struggles mentally, and found that while severe mental illness was not common, just about everyone had had a period in their lives where they had suffered mentally to some degree.

Perhaps the final word was best left to Jesus who said 'come to me if your burden is heavy, and I will give you rest.' In the same way we should accept each other and help each other to further the work of God in the world.

Bill Rook

Living Wage Hexham and Morpeth

Working with St Mary's Justice & Peace group Hexham resulted in their adoption of the Living Wage as one of their major foci in April 2018. Following the example of Morpeth Justice & Peace group their long-term goal is to make Hexham a Living Wage Town, although the exact criteria for this are still being developed by the Poverty Alliance.

The first step was to approach Hexham Churches Together. The Quakers and the R.C. Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle are already registered as Living Wage Employers and after considerable dialogue, the Churches Together group agreed a supportive statement in November 2018.

The Justice and Peace group then approached Northumberland County Council and Hexham Town Council. The advice of Northumberland's Poverty lead officer was to wait until the restructuring had settled before making a formal approach, although the last wage increase had been weighted towards the lowest paid bringing them to an hourly rate between the national living wage and the real Living Wage.

With considerable support from the sole labour councillor on Hexham Town Council, a meeting with Hexham Mayor took place. The Town Council already pay their 3 employees the Real Living Wage and are now considering registering as a Living Wage Employer. They think it is in line with their sustainability agenda and that it will enhance their rating as a town council.

The next step will be to start approaching employers, with the support of Churches Together and the Town Council. Currently the only registered Living Wage employers are the two churches mentioned above, OXFAM, Citizens Advice Bureau, Barclays & HSBC bank. Our hope is to promote the idea in the context of developing ethical tourism in this country

Pat Devlin

Working with Morpeth Churches Justice and Peace group, members of the group spoke with businesses in the town, met with their MP Ian Lavery and county councillors, to promote the Real Living Wage campaign. Despite supportive words by some companies, no one signed up to the Living Wage. Members also attended the town council and asked the council to support the campaign. The council at a later meeting issued a statement supporting the campaign.

Tony Woods

Poverty Sunday 2018

On Poverty Sunday 11th February 2018 about 40 supporters of CAPNE and interested people of Morpeth churches gathered at St Aidans church. The meeting took up CAP's theme of hearing of voices on the margins. We heard about the work of CAP both nationally and the north east group from Tony. Mick Quill from Morpeth justice and peace group told of the problems local people faced on low wages and zero-hour contracts. Nick from Northumberland Pride spoke of the stigma and resultant health issues, both mental and physical, faced by those in the LGBT+ community. A soup and cake lunch was served and enjoyed, and generous donations received and forwarded to CAP Manchester to help them in their work.

Tony Woods

Prison Matters

There has been a lot of change in prison matters over the last twelve months. As I write, the drop-ins at the Independent Methodist Church are not taking place. The trust has received some funding that would enable to appoint a project worker whose role would be research

into what needs ex-offenders have and what services and provisions are available. Christopher Larsen has been appointed to this role and will start on February 1st with an initial contract for 6 months. Christopher is an ex-offender and has good relationship with probationary services and the Key Project. Christopher will also have a role to raise awareness in faith communities to open to support people who are, or who have been, in prison. Christopher will report to the trustees after 3 months as to what he thinks is needed by ex-offenders. The management group of South Tyneside Prison Matter are excited with this appointment. Trustees for the project are needed. If you are interested in being a trustee please contact Chris Hughes at: chris1707hughes@live.co.uk

Chris Hughes and David Peel

Funeral Poverty

Working with St Mary's Hexham Justice & Peace group, links were made with the Quaker led Down to Earth project and the Fair Funerals campaign. The Fair Funerals campaign aims to get funeral directors to sign a pledge by which they recognise the difficulty rising cost of funerals can cause and to be open about the cost of their most affordable options, itemising third party costs.

The three funeral directors (two family firms & the COOP) serving Hexham were approached. Although Cooperative funerals have signed the Fair Funeral Pledge nationally, there seemed to be little evidence of awareness at local level and their most affordable funeral was considerably more expensive than one of the family firms. One family firm did not think cost was a major issue for its customers. The other family firm was very aware of the difficulties faced by some people and as well as offering the most affordable option, also allowed people to pay in instalments without charging interest. However they stated they were not interested in the 'bureaucracy' of signing the pledge.

The Down to Earth project supports people to explore a variety of options for funerals, making clear that expensive does not equate with best. It encourages people to make plans before being faced with a death and produces 10 top tips as well as a comprehensive booklet on everything relating to death and funerals. St Mary's made the 10 top tips available at the back of church along with a funeral planning form. CAPNE have tried to encourage the various denominations in their area to make the comprehensive booklet available to all ministers involved in planning and conducting funeral services, but unfortunately it is still only available online.

Pat Devlin

In Morpeth the top ten tips produced by Quaker Social Action were distributed to the various ministers and clergy of Morpeth's churches. A visit was made and letter given to the 3 family firms and the Co-op in Morpeth. The Co-op staff were aware of that they had signed the Fair Funerals Pledge and had displayed the prices on the wall. The response from the family firms was not enthusiastic, but I am aware that at least one of them does good work in disaster areas of the world.

Since the campaign nationally the Co-op has introduced a lower price level basic funeral option, Dignity have reduced or frozen their prices, and a new entry into the market is

Simplicity funerals offering simple affordable funerals. Locally one of Morpeth's local funeral directors is now offering a new low-cost direct funeral option.

Tony Woods

North of Tyne Combined Authority

'The North of Tyne Combined Authority - Challenges and Opportunities'

Findings from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation provide the challenge and increasing concern that economic growth in the form of additional national income or new jobs do not necessarily 'trickle down' to those most in need, including households experiencing poverty and those living in disadvantaged communities. This has led to calls to better understand the link between growth and poverty as the basis for promoting 'inclusive growth'.

In his book, 'On Human Worth', the Theologian Duncan Forrester argues that at the heart of equality lies the conviction that each person is of infinite, and hence equal, worth and should be treated as such. This conviction should colour our attitudes and relationships and should shape social structures, actual and potential, which are networks of relationships and distribution.

Acting in Good Faith.... It is against this backdrop that a CAP North East task group has focused its interaction and engagement with North East politicians and local authority officers involved in the processing and structuring of the newly established North of the Tyne Authority. The creation of the North of Tyne Authority is reported in the local press as being a ground-breaking deal from Central Government to transfer power and more than £600million of funding to the region over a thirty-year period - an unprecedented transfer of devolved power and investment funding from Westminster to the North East. However, the deal only includes the three North of Tyne authorities – **Northumberland, North Tyneside and Newcastle**. The creation of a new North of Tyne Combined Authority also includes a directly-elected North of Tyne mayor, who it is envisaged will be a champion of the region. Thus, a challenge for CAP NE and its regional allies is whether this structural development will potentially be divisive and prove to be less than regionally inclusive taking into account the concerns and interests of neighbouring authorities such as Gateshead, South Tyneside, Durham and Sunderland with whom CAP NE has ongoing network contacts and working relationships.

The CAP NE Task Group's initiatives. For the purpose of this annual report this can be summarised as follows: We have met with senior officers in the respective authorities of Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland who, with the respective political leaders are in the process of forming the infrastructure of the new Authority. For example, since we began our specific meetings the Cabinet of the new Authority has been established and the process of the election of the mayor has been set for May 2019. Task Group members have attended different stakeholders' events mainly involving organisations and regional business networks.

The Task Group has critically reflected on the key issues and concerns which it wished to explore with the new Authority. The agenda for the engagement meetings has focused on the following concerns and themes:

- How does the new authority plan to measure the success of social inclusion?
- What structures and mechanisms are being developed to gather this evidence?
- What are the implications of the concept of ‘inclusive growth’?
- How can CAP NE and its network allies give voice to people at the margins of society so that they might be participants in the processes of decision making.
- How can the concept of the ‘social economy’ be further explored across the authorities of the North East?
- How can the ‘self-interest’ of the new authority not adversely influence the NE Regional Identity and social coherence

The next stage of the process with the respective authorities is to particularly discuss possible developments relating to point 4 above. How can CAP and allies contribute to developing informed and accessible local groups in disadvantaged areas across the three authorities to share their wisdom and local knowledge in the future decision-making processes. The envisaged action will be taken forward in cooperation with designated officers with a ‘lead role’ regarding poverty and inequality concerns and issues.

Jim Robertson

Gateshead council

Making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives

In October 2018 CAPNE organised a meeting with two Gateshead Councillors and their lead officer, to hear about their programme to enable all within the borough to thrive even in the context of austerity. The meeting was open to all those on CAPNE’s wider mailing list and it was particularly encouraging to see strong representation from a Catholic Gateshead parish who have gone on to follow this up with practical action.

The programme arose from a meeting with all the key partner organisations in the borough in an attempt, in this time of government cuts to council spending, to work in partnership with them to deliver a programme that still enables all Gateshead residents to thrive.



The presentation explained the action points under six key areas: food, fuel, finance(debt), poverty premium, child poverty and welfare.

There will be a follow up conference in February 2019 to assess progress and CAPNE will be represented there.

Pat Devlin

Janet Hodgson Mission from below.

As part of the CAPNE meeting on 27th April 2018, author Janet Hodgson gave a talk on her book 'Mission from below' describing the work of two Loreto Sisters, Imelda and Philippa, in Port Clarence on Teesside. The meeting drew a healthy attendance of regular members and those from the wider group.

Janet described mission from below as mission by the people, of the people, for the people themselves, which she thought was in stark contrast to the usual top-down process, and also challenged the present church growth plan of putting more 'bums on seats' in a dying church.

By the late 1980s there was no church left in Port Clarence, where previously there had been five. The Sisters spent two years listening to the local community, visiting every home. They saw themselves as servant leaders, following Christ. A problem was identified by the community with fuel poverty, and there was no fuel pay point in the town, so payment involved the expense of getting the bus to Stockton. The people found their voice and after a campaign where 95% signed a petition, the Co-op agreed to put a pay point in their store. Stress was laid on the Kingdom of God, as opposed to the Church of God. Prayer and theological reflection were important to the Sisters work. The Sisters finally left after 15 years of ministry on the estate.

Janet had revisited Port Clarence in 2015 to see what remained of the work. The primary school continued to be a focus for the community, with, the principal continuing with the pastoral work. A Community Garden has been developed on waste ground by a retired policeman. Janet said it was an inspiring story that needs to be heard by both the church and the wider community, it was indeed "mission from below".

Questions were taken at the end of the talk. It was felt that the viewpoint of the Loreto Sisters on the project would also have been interesting.

Tony Woods

Citizens Tyne and Wear

Mental Health Assembly

On November 22nd, Tyne and Wear Citizens had their Assembly for their Mental Health Campaign. Over 450 were present, including a significant number of pupils, staff and family from St Thomas More's Academy.

During the assembly the following commitments were made:

- A protocol to be established in Durham to reduce suicides at University.

- The well-being of the people in Byker to be improved by seeking to reduce fly tipping and remove rubbish from the area.
- Churches and Mosques promised to open their premises for a regular meeting open to anyone to reduce loneliness and isolation.
- Students at St Thomas More Academy to work with the local NHS trust to redesign and refurbish a premise used by children and adolescents to improve its welcome and appeal for young people who use mental health services.
- Catherine McKinnell MP for Newcastle Central and a member of the House of Commons Select Committee for Health and Social Care would write to the Chair of that Committee, Dr Sarah Wolasten, asking her to support the drafting of legislation to ensure that every school in England will offer counselling support to their pupils if needed. This is already a legal requirement in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Food Poverty and Fair Change Campaign

Five comprehensive schools in the area have committed to ensuring that all monies allocated to children for free school meals are made available to them to buy food. North Tyneside has agreed to pilot the scheme in two of its schools. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has given Tyne and Wear Citizens funding to make the Fair Change Campaign a national campaign. A lot of work has been asking Local Authorities to become Living Wage Employers. We detect some willingness for LA's to do this but they are reluctant to become accredited as Living Wage Employers since they would be required to ensure all their contractors were Living Wage Employers. Negotiations continue.....

Hate Crime & Safer Cities

The highlight of this year's campaign was the Reclaim the Metro on October 13th. After a gathering at the Monument over 150 took the Metro and rode to Whitley Bay for Fish and Chips. Most women, Muslim and non-Muslim wore hijabs as a sign of solidarity. Two days before Nexus published a Charter to prevent hate crime on their public transports systems.

Mayoral Assembly for the North of Tyne Combined Authority

On May the 2nd there will be an election for the Mayor of the new Combined Authority of North of Tyne which will include the areas of Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside. At the moment the Leadership Group are working to have an assembly where the candidates will be asked to make commitments of a number of 'asks' *reading the campaign that are being run as well as other issues that may be identified by the members of Tyne and Wear Citizens*. We will have the assembly at the Tyne Opera House on April 30th where the launch of Tyne and Wear Citizens took place in November 2018.

Parents and Communities Together Project (PACT)

In the May of last year 'Mum Space' started at St Cuthbert's Church Hall in North Shields. It is a piloted project to explore if community organising methods can help support mums and young children. The project has appointed an organiser, Wendy O'Connell and has volunteers. They welcome mother and children under the age of four on a Tuesday afternoon and Thursday morning. Since May of 2018 over sixty mothers have taken part in the project

On arrival the mums are offered refreshments and then a bit later, the mums if they so wish, can leave the children with the volunteers, to enable them to have some time and quiet with each. Sometimes it is very informal, on other times there may be an input or an exercise in mindfulness.

The aim of the group is to enable mother to be supported and to support each other. It also gives an opportunity for issues to be raised which can be taken up either by Wendy or Tyne and Wear Citizen's organiser, Sara Bryson. Already the group is becoming aware of the poor levels of support on offer in the NHS after a miscarriage.

If you would like to know more about this project or would like to volunteer or offer funds please contact Wendy O'Connell on 0797 0259161 or at: Wendy.McConnell@citizensuk.org
Chris Hughes

Advent reflection 2018

Our day of reflection 2018 was on the theme of *Different Light*, CAP's theme for Poverty Sunday 2019. As we were meeting in December, Deacon Ruth Lackonby, who led the day, gave the theme an Advent twist. First, Ruth invited us to look differently at our concept of God in darkness and to enter the darkness. Next we were invited to reflect on reading scripture, our lives, our communities, our churches and the wider world from a different perspective and in a different light. Finally we reflected on finding God in the darkness. We shared stories about encouraging people at the margins, feeling at home there, and finding the courage to speak out about injustice.

The day was informal and very participative. There was time to look more deeply within ourselves – for personal prayer and reflection, sharing our thoughts and our feelings. Ruth offered us a plethora of resources and a variety of activities to assist our reflections – stories, poetry, art, drawing and writing. We began at 10am with coffee, stopped for a leisurely lunch (shared meal), followed by a walk in the grounds of the R.C. Diocesan Centre, and finished at 3.30pm. Many thanks to Deacon Ruth Lackonby (Durham and Deerness Methodist Circuit).

Bernadette Atkins

CAP National Council of Management

I have been a member of the CAP Council of Management in Manchester since May 2015. CAPNE enjoy good links with CAP, with CAP members of staff attending some CAPNE meetings during the course of the year.

Another local on the committee is Mags Cairney. She first spoke about her experiences on Disability Living Allowance/ESA at an Emmaus meal for Poverty Action Sunday in Hexham. She went on to attend a national Good Society conference and then became a council of management member. This year she joined the officers group of the committee as one of the vice chairs.

Current CAP projects are:

Food Power. Tackling food poverty through people-powered change, in partnership with Sustain. The aim is to support development of more co-ordinated, long term and sustainable approaches to tackling food poverty in local communities.

Self Reliant Groups. Helping people to build their own livelihoods and escape poverty through small scale enterprises.

Your Local Pantry. In partnership with Stockport Homes CAP has developed a social franchise which helps people set up community cooperative food stores, run by volunteers for the benefit of their members in low income communities.

Poverty Truth. Supporting Poverty Truth Commissions throughout the UK. The commissions aim to ensure that people who have experienced poverty first-hand are at the heart of how poverty and inequality are tackled.

Church on the Margins. Challenging churches to prioritise our poorest communities and show solidarity with people struggling to make ends meet. Pope Francis has challenged people to put the poorest people first. What would it truly mean to become 'a poor church for the poor?'

Poverty Media Unit. Making voices heard. Giving support and training so that the stories of people with direct experience of poverty can be the most powerful means of challenging and changing public attitudes to poverty.

More detailed information is available on the website www.church-poverty.org.uk

Tony Woods

Monthly meetings

As mentioned in the introduction the CAPNE group meet on the last Friday of the month (except December) at 2.00 pm in the hall attached to St Lawrence's RC Church, Byker Crescent, Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2JT. We extend a warm welcome to those who wish to join us in working to give a voice to those on the margins of society living with experience of poverty.

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