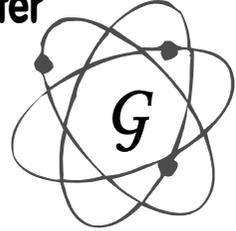


Promoting justice, peace & the integrity of creation

Grapevine

SC^{action}4J Newsletter

Issue No. 60
Autumn 2016



Action for Justice



Letter from the Editor



Hello!

I hope you managed to enjoy some of the lovely sunshine that graced our skies over the summer and are ready for the glorious colours that are beginning to emerge as Autumnal days begin.

This edition looks back to our roots as we share some things from the very first edition of Grapevine published, and also looks forward to a brand new project being considered for Swindon - Swindon Courts Chaplaincy.

As ever Swindon Churches Action for Justice is always keen to welcome new folk who have a particular interest in Justice issues. We alternate our meetings between lunchtimes and evenings to try and cater for as many folk as possible - not everyone attends every meeting! Our next meeting is on Monday 3rd October, 12 noon, at 80 Okus Road. Do get in touch if you'd like to come along and join us.

Barbara

In this issue

	Page
Identity: Who are we?	3
I welcome	5
City of Sanctuary	6
Cafe@Central	7
What would you do in Court?	8
Back to our roots	12
TTIP's Ugly brother	15

Identity: Who are we?

A broad view of history might suggest humanity has developed from tribal politics to military empire politics to national power politics, and that now we have arrived in an era of global identity politics. It is not my purpose to analyse in depth the nature of this current age of identity politics but to suggest the appropriate response of Christians.

But first it will be helpful to look around, so to speak, at the questions of identity which are at issue. Not only are we British increasingly composed of different religious and cultural identities but the problems and opportunities of immigrant people multiply the scale of the issues involved. A radio series in the Spring explored the different cultural identities in the Merchant of Venice and other Shakespeare plays. Anti-Semitism has a long history. But now the scale has grown from Shylock and his daughter to eight or nine million people voting for a Muslim or a Jew as Mayor of London. The Scottish and Europe referenda have been symptomatic of our uncertainty about who we are and where we belong. Anyone who serves the community as part of a helpline organisation realises the enormous number of lonely people who feel they do not fully belong anywhere in an intimate and supportive way they would like. To a lesser or greater extent we are all engaged in finding or consolidating our own identities. For some people their identity is established from birth if they belong to a tightly knit family or they are embedded in a strict ethnic and/or religious culture.

However, in the twenty first century we see the sometimes violent breakdown of old traditional identities with the influence of travel, social media and the internet. As a result of these modern changes religion has begun to decline as a binding force which fulfils the need for identities. From Stonehenge to medieval cathedrals to mosques and temples, religion has united people in their needs for identity. But now we are aware of sometimes frantic attempts to establish identity; Suni versus Shia, Christian right in the USA versus liberal Christianity, while Pope Francis is caught between progressive Roman Catholic thinking and the conservative dogma of many Catholics in the third world. There have

always been such struggles, as at the Reformation. What is significant for us is the global scale of such struggles.

In Jesus Christ our God has given us guidance in these matters. For the practical purpose of his short ministry Jesus identified himself as a Jew among the Jewish population of first century Palestine. As he says, he was sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Yet he did not depend for his sense of identity on his Jewishness. He gave way to the Syro Phoenician woman's pleading and healed her daughter. Three of the four Gospels tell how at his baptism (e.g. Mark 1: 9) he received the divine blessing, 'You are my dear son, I am pleased with you'. Jesus' identity was clearly fixed in his relationship with his Heavenly Father. In the fourth Gospel the identity of Jesus is expressed in his 'I am' sayings and in the use of the Greek concept of Logos.

I was a minister for ten years in the Kent village of Staplehurst. Right in the centre of the community was a memorial which was erected at the end of the first decade, not to soldiers who died in the First World War trenches but to martyrs who died for their Protestant faith under Mary Tudor. The sense of identity for Catholics and Protestants lasted on until the middle of the last century, but now people's sense of loyalty is diffused in many directions; clubs, associations, internet communities, and in widely spread families with Skype contact across the world.

It seems to me that twenty first century Christians are increasingly developing their faith identity individually by means of their personal beliefs, experience, and loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Our new world with its multi media connectedness and its infinite variety of options allows us to be free to search for our own identity.

However, we must beware of spiritual isolationism. I reviewed a book for Flame FM's programme Word by Word and drew attention to a twenty first century prophetic voice, that of Diana Butler Bass. She writes, ' The spiritual search for God and the self wends its way towards others and the world, for without others it is impossible to find God or know who we are.....For Christians, spiritual community, a living renewed church, begins with being in Christ, the first and primary relationship of a vibrant faith life'. (Christianity after Religion: Harper One)

I Welcome



Most of us born in post-war Britain cannot imagine what it feels like to witness violence every day, flee that violence with few possessions and then make a long and dangerous journey to a strange land. The problems don't stop even when you arrive. You have to learn a new language, navigate the tortuous bureaucracy of the Home Office and, eventually, find a home, a job, schools for the children...

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of the world's refugees live in the developing world. To take one example, the countries surrounding Syria have taken in 4 million refugees. In Jordan refugees now outnumber Jordanian citizens. However there are 75,000 Syrians trapped on the Jordanian-Syrian border living in appalling conditions with little food aid, no medical provision and, as the Jordanian authorities and the UN argue over their fate, diminishing hope.

Amnesty International is calling on world leaders to actively work towards resettling more Syrians fleeing war and inhuman living conditions. Amnesty is launching a campaign "I Welcome" to highlight the problems faced by refugees and asylum-seekers and calling on all of us to be more welcoming.

One organisation working to improve the lot of refugees and asylum-seekers who reach our shores is City of Sanctuary and Swindon & Marlborough Amnesty Group is delighted to be supporting the launch of Swindon City of Sanctuary on 13 October at the Platform. This replaces our regular One World Week meeting and we hope as many of you as possible will support it.

The event is free but you do need a ticket. Please see details in Nicola Johnson's article on the following page.

Judith Furse

City of Sanctuary

Swindon City of Sanctuary is a movement which aims to build a culture of inclusion and hospitality towards refugees and asylum seekers living in Swindon.

We are part of a wider organisation called City of Sanctuary which awards towns and cities with sanctuary status once a community is actively helping refugees to feel included within their communities.

We need Swindon to head to our website (<https://swindon.cityofsanctuary.org/>) and **pledge support** to help Swindon gain Sanctuary status. There are three different pledges: one for individual, another for schools and one for businesses & community groups.

All we ask is that you agree to one of the pledges listed to actively welcome refugees & asylum seekers. From sharing our posts on social media to befriending a refugee through The Harbour Project. (The Harbour Project is a Swindon charity which runs drop-in sessions offering friendship and advice to refugees and asylum seekers).

We are officially launching on Thursday 13th October 2016 as part of Harbour Fest - a new weekend long Arts festival celebrating community and culture.

This will be an evening of short talks by the National Coordinator of the City of Sanctuary charity, Swindon Amnesty and The Harbour Project. Followed by an amazing evening celebrating our diverse cultures through entertainment such as Kurdish singers, spoken word of a refugee's journey, Indian dancers and much more. There will also be delicious nibbles cooked by Harbour visitors.

This is a FREE event but we do need you to book your free tickets through the following link: <https://harbourfest1.eventbrite.co.uk>

We hope to bring our community together, to remind us all to look at each other as individuals who all have so much to contribute to our town no matter where we are from.

Contact: Nicola Johnson Tel: 07850941666

Address: Voluntary Action Swindon, 1 John Street, Swindon, SN1 1R

Cafe@Central



RE-OPENING OF CENTRAL CHURCH CAFE, REGENT'S CIRCUS

Great News! We are very pleased to say that Central Church Café is re-opening on Wednesday, 12th October, 2016 - under the new name of 'Café @ Central'.

The Café is to be opened by the Mayor of Swindon - and it would be great if as many people from the local churches could come along from 10 o'clock onwards - to support this exciting new venture.

The old Roundabout Café was much loved by many people in the local community and we were all very sorry when it had to close earlier this year.

The new café has had a bit of a 'make-over' and we will be installing one or two new 'gadgets' such as a lovely, shiny coffee machine! But the good news is that 'Café @ Central' will still retain a very warm welcome for everyone - and there will always be someone on hand to have a chat. We will of course also be offering good food at reasonable prices!

We will initially be open three days a week: Wednesday - Friday - on a 'Volunteer Only' basis - and this is where we are asking for your help. If you - or someone you know - has a few hours to spare once a week, and would like to be part of a great team of volunteers working in a local community café, we would love to hear from you!

If you are interested, please contact Moyra Davies at: pilcen@aol.com

Thank you - and we look forward to seeing you at the 'Opening' on the 12th October!

Rev'd Moyra Davies

What would you do in Court?

Attending Court can be traumatic and emotionally difficult, whether you are attending as :

- Defendant, i.e. the person charged with committing an offence
- Victim of the offence
- Witness
- A family member or friends of any of these

For most of the people attending court it will be the only time they attend a court. They will be nervous, find much of the language difficult, some of it archaic, and unfamiliar with the procedures.

Many people need someone to talk to, give them emotional support and encouragement.

In recent years there has been a decline in Legal Aid. The cost of being legally represented is expensive and people cannot afford to pay the fees. Therefore most people in the Adult Criminal Court are not legally represented.

There is some help for witnesses from the Witness Support Service and for Victims of crime from the Victims Support Service. These services are run by volunteers and are limited in the time and support they can offer. There is no help for Defendants if they are not legally aided. There is a Duty Solicitor Scheme but only for Defendants charged with an offence where a possible sentence could be prison. The majority of Defendants in a Magistrates Court are charged with what are called “minor offences” - for these offences, the Court cannot send a person to prison. Hence the defendant will not be legally represented unless they pay the cost themselves.

PROPOSED CHAPLAINCY SERVICE

The proposed Chaplaincy Service would be multi-faith so it can provide help to people of all faiths and none, people of all cultures, nationalities and languages. It is not aimed at proselytising /preaching a religion or converting people.

The chaplaincy is simply aimed at providing help and support. Legal advice will NOT be provided. The type of help provided will be :

- **Practical Help** - There is paperwork to be completed which many people find confusing. For example, financial penalties imposed by the Court i.e. fines are based on a person income, and every defendant has to complete a “Means Form”. There are also other forms that need to be completed.
- **Emotional Support** – someone to explain what to do, where to go, what will happen.
- **Listening** - people often want to talk about what has happened, so there needs to be someone to just listen
- **Signposting** - referral to other organisation who can help, particularly with financial issues, e.g., Citizens Advice Bureau, Christians Against Poverty
- **Prayer** - this might seem strange but having talked to people who run similar support schemes in Courts in other parts of the country, they say that people often ask for prayer

After a case has been concluded in the Court room, people may want to talk about the impact the sentence will have on them or their family

e.g. If someone has been disqualified from driving - what will be the effect on them and their family?

If a large fine has been imposed, together with a Victim Surcharge and Prosecution costs - how are they going to pay and again what impact will it have on the family?

These are not reasons for letting people off or reducing the sentence imposed by the court.

There are changes being proposed which means that a person charged with an offence will have to log-on to a computer system, and enter their plea – that is to say if they are Guilty or Not Guilty. They will also have to enter details of their income and expenditure on-line. Most people will know how to use the internet or have a Facebook account - all the social media stuff, but when it comes to filling in forms on-line and entering information it is different and a simple mistake could have serious consequences.

Most people do not realise that if they Plead Guilty to a charge at the first opportunity they are entitled to up to 1/3 off the sentence imposed. This is not a reason for pleading guilty when they are not but if they are Guilty it can make a significant difference, so instead of paying a fine of £200, the fine would be reduced to £133.

It is hoped that the Chaplaincy Service would be available for all type of courts that are held in the Courthouses in Swindon.

At Swindon Combined Court :

- Crown Court - Criminal Court - all defendants are legally represented but there is a need to support victims, witnesses, and family and friends of defendants, especially if the defendant is sent to prison
- Civil Court
- Family Court

At Swindon Magistrates Court :

- Adult Criminal Court
- Family Court

FAMILY COURTS

Private Law - With the abolition of Legal Aid in the Family Court, except in very special circumstances, most cases in what are called Private Law matters are dealt with by parents representing themselves. Private Law cases are cases where the parents cannot agree who the child is going to live with, or how much time the child is going to spend with the non-resident parent (what used to be called Access, then Contact, now simply Spend Time With) There is no legal representation so parents have to present their case to the Bench themselves. Often parents want to argue with each other in the court room and parents find it difficult and very emotional.

For a case to be heard an Application Form has to be completed, printed and handed into the Court Office. If the forms are not properly completed they are not accepted and this causes further delay and distress. So having someone at the court to help fill in missing information helps to avoid delay and reduces the emotion. In future all Application Forms will have to be completed and submitted

electronically and that will add further stress to applicants who do not have a computer or who find it difficult to use a computer

Public Law - in what are known as Public Law cases, that is cases where the State – in Swindon, it will be Swindon Borough Council – apply to the Court to remove children from the care of their parent, whilst there is Legal Aid for both parents and the children it is the emotional impact on the parents that is a major issue. It is like a bereavement - because at the end of the process, which can last for many months the children may be permanently removed from the parents and placed for adoption. So having someone to talk to and help parents to cope with the decision the Court has made, will be very helpful.

HOW MUCH NEED IS THERE IN SWINDON?

This is unknown. There is small Chaplaincy team at Salisbury Law Courts with someone on duty every day the courts are sitting. I recently visited the Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre where there is a Chaplaincy Team with two volunteers available every day

I have also received information from Bradford Court Chaplaincy Service where there is a very large chaplaincy organisation and team of volunteers. In Bradford in 2015, they helped 2,986 individuals in the Crown Court and Magistrates Court. They say that the greatest need is to help repeat petty offenders with chronic problems.

Swindon is smaller but no different - there may not be as many people needing help and support but there is a need that we cannot continue to ignore

NEXT STEPS

There is a small steering group, which includes His Honour Peter Blair QC, one of the resident judges at Swindon Crown Court and also David Herrington, the Deputy Justices' Clerk for Wiltshire.

Purpose/Statement of Objectives - the Steering Group hope shortly to be able to circulate proposals setting out the Objectives/Purpose of the Chaplaincy and an outline of how it will operate. This will be circulated to all faith groups in Swindon. The Steering Group will then need to

establish links with other local organisations who will be willing to support the Chaplaincy and accept referrals and provide help and provide on-going support.

Develop Policies and Procedures - policies and procedures will need to be developed and put in place setting out how the chaplaincy will provide help and how it will record and refer people

Training Programmes - will need to be developed for volunteers

Recruitment of Volunteers - most importantly volunteers will be needed

Funding - funding will be necessary to cover costs e.g. administration, training of volunteers, reimbursement of volunteers travelling expenses. If you are interested in knowing more please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Martyn Cook
martyn@thecookhouse.org

Back to our roots

At our Swindon Churches Action for Justice meeting in September where we tossed around ideas for articles for inclusion in Grapevine, we came up with the idea of looking back to the very first Grapevines!

So, I delved into the dusty archives, reached into the depths and pulled out the very first edition! (Actually, I opened the drawer of a filing cabinet in which they are all kept and flicked through the drop folder to the first one, but that doesn't sound quite so dramatic!)

When Grapevine first appeared in January 1989 it was a 'loose leaf' publication with separate A5 papers held inside a green A5 folder (hence choosing green for the outer pages this time!) It was edited by Mary Le Coyte, the then Social Responsibility Officer for Swindon based at Central Church which was, at that time, in Victoria Road. Her opening words in the 'Introducing Grapevine' article were as follows:

‘Welcome to “Grapevine”! “Grapevine” is not yet another church magazine, neither does it demand anything of you - except that you read and reflect. “Grapevine” is published by the Thamesdown Churches Social Responsibility Group, an ecumenical group engaged in further the cause of Christian Social responsibility in all our churches, and we hope, through these pages, to inform and maybe even inspire Christians of all denominations in Thamesdown. ‘

So, not much has changed then! Except we are now ‘Swindon Churches Action for Justice’ and living in the Borough of Swindon rather than Thamesdown. There were articles from Helen Drummond, Helen Tyrrell, Harry Salmon (Methodist Minister and Lecturer at Westhill College, Selly Oak) and the late great Rev’d Andrew Hake. Andrew was an incredible inspiration to many of us in Swindon and is fondly remembered by all who knew him.

The following is one particular article which appeared in that first edition that I would like to share with you.



‘Take a Longish Street.....’

.....on an estate with 1,000 adults living in it. This probably means about 300 houses and perhaps a block of flats. Nothing out of the ordinary. Some detached. Some terraced. Some with gardens. Some without. Some will have large families, others will be in single occupation.

This is what it might look like on the basis of some random aspects of its residents’ needs and behaviour.

- 2 will be blind
- 13 will drink to excess and might be alcoholics
- 170 will be old age pensioners
- 30 will have accidents in the home
- 7 will be in a road accident, and every 6th year one will die as a result
- 600 will go away for their holiday, but

- 400 will stay at home
- 100 will be receiving supplementary benefits
- 2 will die of cancer
- 20 will be convicted in Magistrates' Courts (mostly for driving offences)
- 100 will be hard of hearing, of whom
- 20 will need a hearing aid, and
- 1 will be profoundly deaf.

Put another way, this suggests that within a few hundred yards of where YOU live, there are a lot of people who need help.

The above are 1980 figures - how do you think this situation compares today?



Something to 'read and reflect on'. and I wonder how those statistics might compare today, a further 27 years on! There was also a 'Thought for the day' page which carried a cartoon of a conversation between 2 people:

Person 1: Sometimes I'd like to ask God why he allows poverty, famine and injustice when he could do something about it.

Person 2: What's stopping you?

Person 1: I'm afraid God might ask me the same question

Person 2: !

And finally, the prayer that was included:

May I see my work this day
 as a vocation from you, my God;
 as a ministry to others - those I serve;
 as a privilege, as answering my prayer
 for the coming of your Kingdom. Amen.

I hope you enjoyed this little 'delve into the archives' - maybe I'll dust off another copy next time!

Barbara

TTIPs Ugly Brother

In the last edition we included an article TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership). So what is CETA?

The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is a deal negotiated between the EU and Canada which poses a major threat to our democracy, public services and the environment. Britain is very much a part of this - even after the referendum vote to leave Europe.

It has been dubbed the "little brother" of the better known TTIP between the EU and the USA. But CETA negotiations are already finalised and the deal could be ratified as early as mid 2016.

Like TTIP, CETA could have wide-ranging effects on our lives. If ratified, CETA would:

- Allow corporations to sue governments in secret offshore courts for making laws to protect their citizens.
- Hand multinationals a greater role in making new regulation and thereby risk sparking a race to the bottom in standards for important areas like food safety and environmental regulation.
- Lock in privatisation of services. CETA includes a 'ratchet' clause which only allows governments to move in the direction of privatisation.
- Remove protection for key UK products like Cornish pasties or Cumberland sausages.

If you would like to know more you can contact Global Justice Now (previously World Development Movement), on **020 7820 4900** during office hours, or write to them at Global Justice Now, 66 Offley Road London SW9 0LS

Email: offleyroad@globaljustice.org.uk (general enquiries)

Twitter: [@GlobalJusticeUK](https://twitter.com/GlobalJusticeUK)

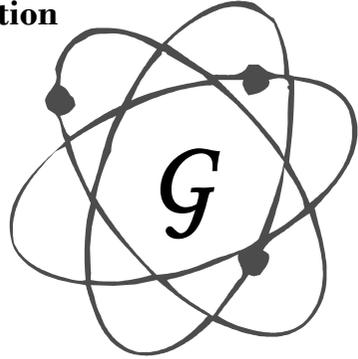
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Action for Justice

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CAN YOU HELP COVER THE COST OF THE NEXT PUBLICATION?



50 donations of £5 would cover the cost to produce our next edition. Any donation, however large or small, will be gratefully received and will enable us to continue publishing this magazine. Please send your gift to Barbara Aftelak, 80 Okus Road, Swindon, SN1 4JP.

Cheques should be made payable to ‘Swindon Churches Together’ please and it would help if you could mark your donation “for Grapevine”.

The Editor is always pleased to receive articles for publication in the magazine which has a widespread readership with 1,200 copies being distributed across Swindon, Marlborough, Highworth, Wroughton and various places in between! Plus it is available on our website.

www.swindonchurches.org

Views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily the views held by the majority of the members of SC4J or the Editor.

This is what the Lord requires of you: only this, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8