

*This is the text of a talk given at St Luke's, Goodison Road, Walton, Liverpool on 25 January 2016. Professor Hilary Russell launched her book 'A Faithful Presence' and Jenny Sinclair spoke about the work of Together for the Common Good. This was part of a month long community festival involving local groups, schools and churches: 'Hope16 - working together for the common good'.*

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## **Building communities: working together for the Common Good**

Congratulations to everyone who's been involved in Hope16: it's been fantastic and an honour to be involved. Before I speak about Together for the Common Good, I want to explore hope, and "what's going on".

### **HOPE**

The book of Proverbs says *"hope deferred makes the heart sick"*.

One of the objectives about Hope 16 was to prepare Alsop High School students for adult life by equipping them with Hope. After all, habits of mind become habits in our lives, and habits affect outcomes.

Practising an attitude of hope is like exercising a muscle, it strengthens our capacity, it builds our ability to create human capital and it gives us courage.

I wondered how Alsop would teach hope. I should have known how expertly teachers can distil a complex concept into a teachable idea. Where better to start than with *Compassion* as the foundation for living hopefully?

Alsop collapsed the curriculum for a whole day. They looked at indifference, intolerance, injustice and at cultivating the attitude of seeing the potential for good in others. In one workshop I heard a pupil say:

*"It's easier to judge someone wrongly if you don't know their story: if we continue like the older generation, our society will go down."*

She's right.

### **WHAT'S GOING ON**

People who don't feel needed have nothing to lose.

Like Anne Marie, a mum who only goes out to collect the children from school and stays at home watching TV. Her loneliness and isolation exist in parallel with the wall-to-wall stories she watches of other people's lives.

It may be a truism, but to thrive, communities need people and they need to be rooted in place. A flourishing community needs people to meet each other, to need each other and to live a common life together.

We know this, but it's more difficult to tackle when our life together has been so neglected, and as the diversity of our communities has increased and society has fragmented into special interest groups.

Many people have abandoned the local organisations, traditions and associations that used to embody a sense of local pride, in favour of services and cultures provided by the state and the

market. Over decades, civil society (not least the church and the family) has given up responsibilities it used to carry.

We've mistakenly put our faith in a managerial system: both market and state cannot grapple with the poverty of relationships, the lack of power, agency and hope in people's lives. Nor can they muster an understanding of the trust, faithfulness, sense of belonging and place, and the local institutions essential to preserve and maintain skills, honesty and vocation.

The Church of England Bishops' letter *Who is My Neighbour?* published in 2015 has these themes running right through it. It highlights the failure of the two big post-war political strategies – the welfare distributionism of 1945, and the 1979 free market revolution - and suggests a new settlement for the Common Good based on ethics and virtues where the market and the state are balanced by a strengthened civil society in which the church has an important contributory role.

### **LINKING HOPE TO T4CG**

At Together for the Common Good we take the same view and our mission is to be a catalyst that will help to make this new settlement for the Common Good a reality.

At our first conference here in Liverpool in 2013 delegates asked for a 'language of hope' and 'the vocabulary of the common good.'

So since then we have been looking at this, what you might call *'the gritty work of hope'*.

Jeremiah captures the Common Good when he says:

*"Seek the welfare of the city and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."*

This was the text my mum and I chose for my dad's memorial stone in Liverpool Cathedral in 2010. It expresses what his life was about, and conveys the mission of his partnership<sup>1</sup> with Archbishop Worlock (I'll call them David and Derek), their Free Church Colleagues and the clergy and laity in this city.

They created an outward-facing, collaborative church presence which had the flourishing of people and community at its heart. They were seen by the city to be working together for the common good.

### **MY STORY**

I came to Liverpool aged 13, same as Alsop's Year 9s, I never thought I'd be involved with something like Together for the Common Good. Although social justice and the church were the meat and drink of our kitchen table, at that time my preference was for playing in a band and the nighttime attractions of Matthew Street.

But in time something stirred in me, and in my mid-twenties, my journey of faith surprised me and I became a Roman Catholic. I married and had a family. Then, after my mother's death five years ago, my life changed.

I became curious about David and Derek's legacy and particularly about what they learned from each other. How much of each other's social traditions did they adopt? What was their *'Better Together'* philosophy really about?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/background.html>

## T4CG

I found myself drawing a cross formed of the words *ecumenism* and *social justice* and I was drawn to the intersection which seemed to say *reconciliation*.

I had a strong sense that the Holy Spirit had plans, but I felt out of my depth. I prayed my way along and asked for help, looking for allies. After a year, something began to take shape that eventually became *Together for the Common Good*.

So David and Derek's partnership prompted us to encourage people of good will to work together, across belief traditions and political persuasions, to be agents of *creative* change and take responsibility for the common good.

Alongside the conference, we ran a research programme into how faith based organisations and churches work together for the common good – the findings are published in Hilary's book. An online resource was set up; leading thinkers from different traditions produced a book on the Common Good from different political and belief perspectives. We hosted public debates and private conversations bringing MPs and Peers together across party lines. We want to share the practice the Common Good more widely so we're developing a range of creative approaches. Our newsletter is read by over 1,700 people and organisations. We're independent, nonpartisan and ecumenical: with tiny resources we always work in partnership. So rather than a membership organisation, we act more like a catalyst.

## THE PARTNERSHIP

Like Derek and David, we see the potential of *Reconciliation* as a methodology for the Common Good.

When our society is fragmenting into vested interests who know one another less and less, the work of reconciliation is more and more important if our modern pluralistic life together is going to work.

They were honest brokers, bridge builders between estranged groups, local and national. Whilst their *bias to the poor* was rooted in faith, they knew that if they took sides, solutions for the vulnerable would be harder to broker. They were branded as traitors by the left and as naïve and statist by the right. They worked with business and civic leaders to create conditions for attracting investment. They ignored warnings against collaborating: their body language and shared witness trumped sectarianism and made the church relevant. Above all, they worked alongside communities, encouraging local leadership. The Eldonians<sup>2</sup> is a case in point – a local institution built by local people with a sense of pride, belonging and place.

They were custodians of hope: not peddling the false hope of revolution, but the real hope of a common life that can only come from incremental steps involving everyone.

So as we learn about their partnership we see clear themes:

- it was outward-facing, drawing on that Anglican sense of hospitality, with the flourishing of the whole community at heart;
- it had the principles of Catholic social thought running through everything they did;
- and their ecumenical witness demonstrated they were not acting in their own institutional

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<sup>2</sup> <http://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/case-studies/articles/the-eldonian-village.html>

interests, but in the interests of people and community.

## THE COMMON GOOD

The Common Good resonates widely from the *Global ethic* to *Indaba* to *Shalom*. At the same time we are finding that the concept is most coherently expressed within the principles of Catholic social thought, that special but hitherto rather too well hidden '*gift to all people of goodwill.*'

The Common Good is the set of conditions in which every individual in the community can flourish. Yes, but the creation of those conditions is something we do. So we talk about the *practice* of the Common Good.

So it is not a utopian ideal to be imposed by one enlightened group upon another. No, it comes about by working out those conditions together, through the application of core principles. It involves brokering relationships between those who hold different views, and balancing different interests.

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

Now Catholic social thought is often seen as being about the promotion of social justice, which it certainly is. But the more time you spend with it, the more you realise it's *also* a recipe for a healthy civil society: how to build a common life together. It's a living body of thinking drawing from across many traditions and learned experience. It reflects how Jesus wants us to live. It has been called the theology of the Holy Spirit in practice! To make it more accessible we call it *Common Good Thinking*.

There's sometimes a temptation to *pick and mix* from the principles but all of them, especially *the common good*, *solidarity* and *subsidiarity* – must be harnessed together.

*Solidarity* emphasises that all are responsible for all, that we are interconnected by relationships of mutual concern and support. *Subsidiarity* emphasises responsibility at the appropriate level – decisions should always be taken closest to where they will have their effect and no higher than necessary.

*Solidarity* applied without due attention to subsidiarity can tend towards collectivism and centralisation. Similarly *subsidiarity* without *solidarity* can leave people on their own, unsupported.

The other principles include *stewardship*, *reciprocity*, *human dignity* and *equality*, *participation* and *association* ... and most importantly, the central teaching that we put the *poor and vulnerable first*.

The principles, or 'Common Good Thinking' can be put into practice wherever we are, integrated as part of our vocation and spirituality.

## ROUTES TO JUSTICE

It offers a route to justice that views our everyday lives through the lens of Gospel values and has humanity at its heart.

Rooted in love, this body of thinking rejects ideological approaches to justice, Liberal or Marxist: it presents a critique of collectivism as well as of capitalism, because when out of balance with civil society, they both have a tendency to dehumanise.

The old left-right orthodoxies have not succeeded in building a common life. The adversarial

approach is off putting for the majority of people of good will who want to contribute. Most people want something more human, more rooted in which everyone takes responsibility.

## **PLACE AND INTERMEDIATE INSTITUTIONS**

Rooted community is important – building up human capital in local, intermediate institutions that are not controlled by the market or the state. This means the clubs, societies, schools, universities, residents’ associations, unions, churches, synagogues, mosques, professional and cultural associations – and the connections between them. We know this is done through our *participation*.

## **LOCAL LEADERSHIP**

*Subsidiarity* says only as much help as is asked for should be given. This is how capacity is built. It is about *working with* rather than *doing good to*. This means local leadership. As David and Derek learned:

*“Inner cities only survive and prosper if the skilled residents stay there and are involved in building their own destiny, creating places of pride and belonging.”*

Paternalistic assistance has no place here. It is about communities taking responsibility and helping each other, supported by government or local institutions to a level which enables them to thrive but remain empowered.

## **APPLYING CG THINKING MORE WIDELY**

To resist the domination of money or bureaucracy, we need to build a Common Good wherever opportunities arise.

Such as treating people as human beings at foodbanks and homeless shelters and as good neighbours, yes this shows the potential of what we can do. But applying the principles more widely than this is only limited by our imagination.

We can be more ambitious and contribute to deep structural change through creating a common good as stakeholders, as employees, as employers, as business owners, in our relationships, as members of organisations, investors, policy makers, savers and shareholders, as civic leaders or citizens. We can see traction already in ethical investment, purposeful business practices, the living wage, land trusts, community finance, community energy projects and so on.

## **RELATIONSHIP**

We cannot create the common good on our own, or by just talking with our friends. It requires people who may disagree, and whose interests and circumstances are different, to encounter each other in *relationship*.

The practice of the Common Good is a kind of alchemy. As an approach it’s so different from the adversarial way of doing things. I’ve seen it happen in our conversations with MPs of different parties, applying the principles to policy.

Something surprising happens. Without each other we are impoverished, complacent and our solutions become unsustainable. Our complementary skills and insights are necessary to tackle a shared concern together.

Going against tribal instincts requires courage. And an attitude of hope.

As a Year 9 student so wisely said:

*“We make an assumption about someone before we get to know them. We judge, discriminate, condemn.”*

## **BRIDGE BUILDING**

This calls us to an approach which is profoundly relational. At its heart it is about what Jean Vanier calls ‘a culture of encounter’. It starts with conversation.

Some of us may discern a vocation for this challenge - to be bridge builders – across divisions – between marginalised and powerful, left and right, faith and secular, educated and uneducated, consumers and shareholders, management and employees, urban and rural, old and young.

For example, I’ve heard that some local tenants here are experiencing housing problems related to absentee landlords and overseas property investors. Part of the difficulty may be the estrangement of the relationship between investor and tenant. One way forward might be for a Bridge Builder to facilitate a meeting, a conversation between all the stakeholders. Each will have interests that need to be represented. To build a Common Good, people must be open to negotiation.

## **REHUMANISING**

We’re not about campaigning or lobbying, which so often entrenches positions. This is about addressing relationships and rehumanising systems that have lost their soul; injecting ethics and virtues where they have been squeezed out or forgotten.

It is about tackling systems that prevent us from seeing each other as human beings.

If we are stuck in a managerial mindset it will become harder and harder for people to treat each other in a way that gives life meaning.

There’s a story about some Australian nursing homes after a series of neglect scandals. Instead of going for increased regulation, they tried replacing a complex rulebook with simple goals like “a homelike setting,” and “respecting the dignity of the residents”. This freed staff to use their own judgment and exercise their conscience. It empowered the lowest grade staff, led to materially better outcomes for residents and raised morale. We can see how Common Good principles have worked here.

## **AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH**

Anne Marie, who I mentioned earlier, was invited to help a local group. Before this, she said, she had no reason to go out. It built her confidence to find that others needed her. A Common Good approach says that the community cannot thrive without her, it needs the contribution that only she can bring. An Asset-Based approach will say, ‘We need you. You have gifts and skills.’ She is the author of her own solution in relationship with others. By contrast, a needs-based analysis focuses on what she lacks, what services need to be provided for her, what systems need to be changed, so she is a recipient.

Jeremiah tells us, by joining with others, she will see that in seeking the welfare of her community, she will find her own welfare.

One of the Year 9s instinctively saw the value of human capital. He said:

*“It’s not all about giving support financially, people show they care in other ways, say in conversation.”*

## VOCATION

We need to personally *feel* the change that comes from building a common life. Each of us has the opportunity to '*seek the welfare of the city*' - wherever our vocation takes us.

Sometimes it's a revelation to realise that things you do and connections you have, that you thought were unconnected with your faith, may be directly relevant to building the common good. Through our connections we can help strengthen the vital intermediate, local institutions – and create new ones: the outward-facing places that foster the virtues, where people know they will be heard, loved and valued.

## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

This ties in with the mission of the Church: The Common Good is one of Archbishop Justin's Quinquennial goals and Reconciliation is one of his three priority areas.

Pope Francis sees a loving, personal responsibility as the foundation for the Common Good, and says again and again that it is only *Mercy* that can challenge the "indifference" that enables injustice and mercilessness to thrive. It is a route to justice.

One of the Year 9s really got it, she said:

*"Empathy means putting yourself in someone else's shoes. Apathy means no feeling for another person."*

If we are to succeed in building this new settlement for the Common Good, then like David and Derek we will all have to put our shoulders to the wheel and work together, putting our differences aside. But this doesn't mean we have to like each other or water down our distinctive practices and beliefs. Indeed our diversity will be a strength. It's not going to be easy. It's not going to be quick.

Church people, buildings, parishes, are perfectly placed to be at the heart of the solution and there is already a huge amount going on. But to truly broker a Common Good, our habits of mind will need to be practised and shared more effectively across civil society: our traditions of love, responsibility, human dignity, family, community, relationships. Increasingly people are realising this is about rehumanising a system in which there is not enough love. We might call it building Love Capital.

We are custodians of attitudes that are capable of strengthening society.

Underestimating the significance of this is to miss a trick. Wherever we have the opportunity we should be the ones with the courage, who are prepared to 'stay in the room', negotiate and keep the dialogue going, recognising the humanity in everyone and affirming the legitimacy of what they have to say.

This is what we mean by being agents of change for the Common Good. God has called us into a great creative participation (to paraphrase the late Austin Smith) and we're learning from each other.

Liverpool has a track record of *Reconciliation* and practising the Common Good. We know better than anyone about the transformational power of hope.

You could say we are 'custodians of hope': so where better to start than here.

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*Jenny Sinclair is the daughter of the late Bishop David Sheppard, who had a celebrated working partnership in Liverpool with Archbishop Derek Worlock and Free Church leaders. Raised an Anglican, in her mid twenties she had a conversion experience and was received into the Catholic Church. In 2011 she felt moved by the Spirit to found a project and a network called Together for the Common Good. It is now her vocation to work within that network to cultivate dialogue between all people of good will and encourage them to work together, across their different political and belief traditions, for the common good.*

**Hope16: to see more about the month-long festival and calendar of events, click on the link below:**

[http://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/files/images/Ali's photos/HOPE 16 FLYER ALSOP HIGH WALTON.pdf](http://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/files/images/Ali's%20photos/HOPE%2016%20FLYER%20ALSOP%20HIGH%20WALTON.pdf)

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