

Building the common good: our responsibility

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1. Starting point

Thank you so much for your generous invitation - it's really an honour for me to be here with you.

I know we share similar concerns. We care about people, community and social transformation. We are motivated by our faith, and we feel called to build God's kingdom so that families can live lives to the full.

Brexit - however we feel about it - has lifted the lid on inequality - what we in the churches have known for years - but it is now unambiguously clear for all to see. And it has also exposed a deep social fragmentation on many levels.

It's more important than ever therefore for us to recognise the special role that we – the people in the church - can play at this critical point and in the coming months and years, in working for justice and building a social peace: how we can help our country work for the common good.

So let's go back to our roots and look at how our tradition can inspire and resource us. I'll tell you a bit about *Together for the Common Good*, working ecumenically and across traditions. I'll talk about the Common Good *as a practice*, linking with our vocation and our spirituality. I'm going to look at the mission of the church and our special calling to build community and strengthen society. We'll explore, and celebrate, different ways to foster the relationships necessary for a just and peaceful common life together.

2. Where are we now?

I don't know about you, but during the campaign leading up to the Referendum I got that sick feeling you get in a hall of mirrors. Proposition after proposition was put forward.

Self-interests were offered to us as desirable choices, and then reflected back at us in multiple distorted ways. Like a *self-referential* world with no air.

Social media acted like echo chambers and opinion polls exaggerated the whole process.

But whether you were for *Remain* or *Leave*, the people made their position clear. Things have been exposed that have been festering under the surface for many years.

Overwhelmingly, the Leave vote came from poor areas.

For too long, a so-called *progressive* agenda has held the views of working class and other traditional communities *in contempt*. They feel patronised and insulted. They have been ridiculed, sidelined, called stupid, old fashioned, inward-looking, disapproved of as politically incorrect. Ignored, abandoned, exiled.

And when people from traditional, proud cultures experience humiliation and powerlessness they *will* eventually respond. The United States is experiencing a similar seismic reaction too.

It is necessary to understand that people have different interests. To build a common good, we must encounter the other and then negotiate to achieve a balance.

To do this we will have to get to know each other better and foster relationships between people who don't know - or don't like - each other.

3. The role for the church to strengthen civil society

Before we judge anybody else, we should look first to ourselves.

Let me tell you about Ann Marie, who I know through my friend Cathi. Ann Marie lives with her four children on a run-down estate. She used to spend most of her time in her flat watching tv, going out only to get the kids from school. She said she didn't have the confidence and there was nothing to do round where she lives.

She felt the church people in her area were more interested in campaigning about justice or helping refugees than in people like her right on their doorstep.

This is how Anne Marie experienced the Church.

Have we as Christians judged people? Ignored or dismissed certain people or favoured some groups over others?

Pope Francis is calling for a poor church for the poor and of the poor.

Government efforts such as the minimum wage and the tax system can help to tackle inequality and poverty statistics but they *can't fix* poor relationships, isolation, lack of agency; and they can't fix the lack of meaning in people's lives.

Has our notion of justice come down to handing out bits of money?

The case for Remain was built on economic arguments. But many of the people who voted Leave wanted something more meaningful.

Faith in the City published in 1985 said:

“Poverty is not only about shortage of money. It is about relationships; about how people are treated and how they regard themselves; about powerlessness, exclusion and loss of dignity.”

And now that the fragmented, unequal and divided nature of our country is laid bare, we need an examination of conscience, perhaps even of the Church itself.

It’s a hard question, but *at parish level*, have we *personally* overlooked people like Anne Marie?

Is it worth taking a reality check: has there been a tendency, unintentionally perhaps, to rank the needs of some over others?

Ignoring the interests of other human beings in our own society is to exclude the possibility of what they have to contribute.

In Pope Francis’ theological tradition, sometimes called the Theology of the People, ‘poor’ refers to people who live with the experience of *non-power*. This can be social, material, relational, spiritual, economic or in other ways. He says if the Holy Spirit is set free among these people this is how the Church itself will be transformed.

Faith in the City highlighted relational poverty 30 years ago. Now, some in the Church of England are addressing the new context. Philip North, Bishop of Burnley says:

“We are hooked on an out-dated Temple model: thinking we are doing good by shouting at government from on high rather than seeking locally-based solutions. I am sick and tired of hearing pompous tosh about the ‘Church’s prophetic voice’ or the ‘Church in the public square’ whilst at the same time we are busy abandoning the people we purport to represent.”

Our common life together is being challenged.

The emphasis on rights, identity politics, extremism and single interest groups amplifies mutual suspicion and fragmentation. And social media, dangerously, can actually make interaction *less likely* with people different from ourselves.

The potential of what the church can do to meet this challenge is vastly underestimated.

Our traditions of love, hope, responsibility, human dignity, family, community, relationships - habits of mind particularly well practised by Catholic women – are sorely needed now.

We know that money is not the whole answer.

There is a special role for the church to strengthen civil society.

We can foster a culture of encounter, where people of different experience meet – at all levels and in all sectors. *We* can build the links between local institutions and between estranged groups.

Can we 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, affirming the legitimacy of what they have to say?

Church buildings, parishes and people are perfectly placed to be at the heart of the solution.

We can create value that doesn’t necessarily require money.

The concept of mercy is at the heart of this.

Do you remember the feeling of being totally forgiven? Totally loved by God?

This is what the church is meant to do, through us – to convey that feeling. To everyone, especially the hard to love. Not just our favourite people.

This is the kind of church Pope Francis has been asking us to be since *Evangelii Gaudium*.

This is the kind of outward-facing church Archbishop Derek Worlock, my father Bishop David Sheppard and their Free Church colleagues built together a generation ago.

They listened to all the voices. They were branded statist by the Thatcherite right. And as traitors by the hard left. They didn’t take the easy path.

They brokered relationships between mutually suspicious and hostile groups - police and black community, business and unions, stood in solidarity with communities as they found themselves caught between the Militant tendency and the Conservative government. They kept channels of dialogue open. They worked with business, affirming their crucial role for the common good.

Their twenty-year ecumenical partnership encouraged the churches of that time – clergy and laity - to empower *local leadership* in ‘communities of the left behind’. They worked alongside people, not doing *to* but working *with* people like Anne Marie, building up their capacity.

Their body language said it all: side-by-side they modeled an outward-facing church acting in the interests of the people, not in the interests of their individual institutions.

It was a church in the street, in factories, in offices, in business - not only in the pews.

They were ‘responsive to context’ – not obsessed by the church, or by politics, but more concerned with the messiness of human life, the reality of human life.

They were not socialists, but radical traditionalists for whom poverty was an affront to the body politic.

They resisted the seduction of political ideology on both the right *and* the left.

They resisted being sidetracked by doctrinal differences. But loyal to their own traditions: no syncretism there. They learned from each other, realising that each had different gifts to bring. Gifts like Catholic social teaching, the see-judge-act methodology, hospitality to the whole community, courage and negotiating skills. United in the Gospel.

They rolled up their sleeves and enjoyed smelling like sheep.

This is what made the church relevant then, and it's what society needs now.

What if this became the default way to be a Christian? Not just for bishops and church leaders, but all of us.

This is what inspires *Together for the Common Good*. I'll talk more about that in a few moments.

4. First things: the Trinity, vocation and spirituality

But before that, let's see why relationship is at the heart of our tradition.

I'm sure you know this extraordinary 14th Century icon by Rublev.

It takes as its subject the mysterious moment where Abraham receives three visitors as he camps by the oak of Mamre.

On one level this picture shows three angels seated under Abraham's tree.

On another it's a window into the realm of God.

It's a visual expression of what the Trinity means, the nature of God, and how every living person is called into a great creative participation with him.

Reading the picture from left to right, we see: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



The Father looks forward, raising his hand in blessing to the Son. His gesture expresses a movement towards the Son. "This is my Son, listen to him..." "

The hand of the Son points on, around the circle, to the Spirit.

We can see the movement of life towards us, flowing clockwise around the circle.

As the Father sends the Son, as the Son sends the Holy Spirit, so we are invited and called to complete the circle with our response.

We respond to the movement of the Spirit - who points us to Jesus.

This is the *movement* of our lives, in response to the movement of God.

There are three signs at the top of the picture: the hill, the tree, and the house.

The Spirit touches us. He leads us by ways we may not be aware of, up the hill of prayer.

It may be steep and rocky, but the journeying God goes before us along the path.

It leads to Jesus, and it leads to a tree.

A great tree in the heat of the day spreading its shade. A place where we begin to find out the possibilities of who we can be.

The tree is on the way to the house of the Father. The door is always open for the traveller, for the returning prodigal.

Each of the visitors has a staff to show they enter into our journey, our slow movement across the face of the earth.

God is with us in the weariness of our human road and sits down at our ordinary tables.

There's a space for us at this table. We're invited to complete the movements of God in the world by our own response. We're invited to enter into a relationship. It's being part of this relationship that makes us fully human.

So as we think about our country, justice and a social peace, *this* is the point from which to start: from the Gospel, out of Jesus's interior life.

This gives us a jolly big clue about our role as Christians in the world.

It's *our job* to show how humanity can recover a proper view of the human person. Not through the lens of money or unfettered personal liberalism, nor through extremist political positioning, nor through a *dehumanising* lens of efficiency and distributionism. But through one human person's relations with another.

The primacy of the human person in relationship with others.

As Pope Benedict said in *Caritas in Veritate*:

"As a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. It's not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God."

And Pope Francis says - if we don't keep this channel open then we'll be no more than an NGO.

To discern our mission, or our 'hidden journey', requires a very deep kind of trust.

A trust that 'where God has placed me is sufficient, not knowing where it will go'.

5. Together for the Common Good, the Common Good and Catholic social teaching

That kind of trust is what has brought me here today.

Five years ago I had no idea what was in store. I can only describe what happened as a movement of the Spirit, pulling me onto a completely new path. I was living an ordinary life, working in graphic design and as a serial volunteer, then motherhood and raising a family. My sons were 11 and 13. For the first time since my conversion to the Catholic Church in my mid-twenties, I felt I was being called. It was my 'hidden journey' breaking through.

I found myself drawing a cross formed of the words *ecumenism* and *social justice*. And the intersection seemed to say *reconciliation*. It seemed the Holy Spirit had plans, but it wasn't clear to me what to do.

For the first time in my life I felt drawn to look at what my father and Archbishop Derek learned from each other; what was their '*Better Together*' philosophy really about; how could it be relevant for now. I felt out of my depth but prayed my way along. And asked for help.

I could hear my dad saying 'who are your allies?'

A steering group formed in 2012. We didn't intend to do more than hold a conference and publish a book. But it's grown, and is continuing to grow, unfolding in all sorts of unpredictable creative ways.

Our newsletter is now read by over 1,800 people and organisations. Our website is a well-used resource, we've published our research into ecumenical social action as a handbook, along with a book of essays on the Common Good from different political and belief

perspectives. We assist others in their efforts for the common good, we host public debates and private conversations bringing people of different traditions together.

We're now developing materials to enable teachers, clergy, laity, communities and young people to engage with the Common Good as an idea and as a practice.

We're deliberately not a membership or a campaigning organisation. We like to be low key, a bit like a catalyst - to prompt others rather than to centralise. We have a staff of one (me) plus an intern for a few months. There is a lot of momentum around our work and we need to grow our capacity to be sustainable. But it seems we are sent the graces we need: we punch above our weight thanks to our steering group members, associates working on our projects, our community of advisers and working partnerships across all the denominations and beyond. There are about forty of us actively involved in the core work. We're ecumenical, non-partisan, and independent of any institution or denomination. There is no place for sectarianism or factionalism here.

We're open to learning from each other. We encourage 'Common Good conversations'.

Like David and Derek, although we disagree on some things, sometimes quite serious disagreements, we think it's mutually beneficial to work together across our differences.

Reconciliation was their method for building the Common Good. So *like them*, we want to encourage and equip people of good will to work together, across their beliefs *and* political differences, as agents of change for the Common Good.

Especially the laity, sitting at the table in conversation with the Trinity, open to discerning their hidden journeys.

The Common Good

Now before we go any further, can I just be clear what we mean by the Common Good. We all think we know what it means, but definitions are contested.

So the idea resonates from Aristotle, to Ubuntu, Shalom, across humanist, Jewish, Christian and other traditions. No one has a monopoly on the idea of the Common Good.

We draw from across all the Judeo Christian traditions and in particular, from Catholic social teaching – or, as it is a living body of thinking - you could say Catholic social learning.

So the classic definition goes: "the Common Good is the set of conditions in which every individual in the community can flourish." Yes.

But if we stop there then the concept sounds woolly and can be misrepresented.

We think it's *how* that set of conditions is created that is the crucial question.

It is not a utopian ideal to be imposed by one 'enlightened' group upon another.

The Common Good needs to be built *by us, together* across our differences.

It starts with conversation. Locally, by people talking to each other.

I cannot create the Common Good on my own, neither can you: I cannot create it by just talking with my friends.

To build a Common Good requires people who may disagree, and whose interests and circumstances are different, to encounter each other in *relationship*. The results are surprising.

It's a kind of alchemy.

It is about a balance of interests. Simply put 'it is in my interests that you thrive.'

So *we* talk about the *practice* of the Common Good.

And although it's a principle in its own right, we are also using "the Common Good" as an overarching term to refer to all the core principles set out in Catholic social teaching: because the building of the Common Good depends on the application of all those principles.

Catholic social teaching

As we know, Catholic social teaching is about the promotion of social justice, but it's *also* a recipe for building a common life together.

As we've tried to share it across Christian traditions its *name* is often a barrier to non-Catholics.

So, in an ecumenical and broader context, we talk about 'Common Good Thinking' and at entry level we use the broad headings of:

- 'The Common Good;
- The Person;
- Relationship;
- Stewardship; and
- Everyone is included, no one is left behind.'

Beneath these headings are the familiar principles of 'human dignity, dignity of work, equality, respect for life, reconciliation, subsidiarity, solidarity, participation, association',

and the importance of intermediate institutions. We are very careful to remain true to the integrity of CST. You can see how we do it in more detail on our website.

It's important that we give weight to *all* of the principles, and *resist* the temptation to 'pick and mix' based on our own particular concerns.

And to keep in mind that we can only release the potential of what these principles can *do* if we keep that channel – our relationship with the Trinity – open.

We *must* be clear where our centre of gravity lies.

Catholic social teaching rejects ideology, both individualist and collectivist – big business and big government - both tend to dehumanise. CST offers a constructive process of discernment, not a protest narrative.

CST will only secure credibility as widely as it should, *if* it is clearly understood to transcend party politics. Its potential will never be realised if it, or we who use it, are seen to be an appendage of a particular party.

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

Partisan, tribal politics puts off the majority of people of good will.

Most people want to contribute and build a better world - but they don't want to be part of a politicised, tribal approach.

For a long time the social justice field has been the preserve of a minority.

What about everybody else?

The majority has in effect been *cut out* and their contribution lost.

How do we get those people involved?

If we are to succeed in a new settlement for the Common Good, we all need to put our shoulders to the wheel and work together.

We can no longer afford to limit our potential with a restricted view. We cannot continue to do things the way they've always been done.

We need a joined-up approach that makes it possible for everyone to find a role, so they find their own 'hidden journey' linking with their vocation.

This is deeply connected to the mission of the Church.

As *Deus Caritas Est* reminds us:

'For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity that could be left to others, but is an indispensable expression of her very being.'

So - social action is not an 'add-on' but an integral part of what it means to be a Christian. We can only do this authentically if we see ourselves and everyone we encounter through the eyes of God, with Jesus as our Lord and friend.

6. The wider application of Catholic social teaching – the *practice* of the Common Good

Over the last five years my curiosity has led me to explore different traditions and sectors, and I'm convinced that we are less effective while we are divided and unaware of each other's approaches and gifts.

It's time to climb out of our silos and see what else is going on – looking across sectors, and ecumenically - from the parish to the boardroom.

The application of 'Common Good Thinking' principles is only limited by our imagination.

There is of course a huge amount going on at the level of the institutional churches, the religious orders, the major charitable and denominational agencies – like CAFOD, Salvation Army, Christian Aid, Tearfund, and the charities in the Caritas network: involving thousands of volunteers, in so many sectors, dealing with homelessness to refugees, from prisoners to modern slavery.

But what about at *parish* level among the mainstream laity, and other ordinary people of good will?

And, can we be more ambitious than we have been?

Perhaps we need a broader view of how our principles can be and are being applied to achieve deep, structural change.

Let me share with you some of what I have learned - what is going on across different sectors and traditions - the wide range of ways in which 'Common Good Thinking' principles are being applied:

- There's Citizens UK of course, perhaps the best known application of the CST principles – empowering people through the Living Wage, CitySafe and other campaigns;

- I've long admired the Church Urban Fund, their churches Together Networks, and their Near Neighbours programme – helping parishes encourage people of different faiths and of no faith to come together to improve neighbourhoods;
- There's the essential social knitting going on at grassroots level by the ecclesial communities, following their own charism like Focolare, the Columbans, Maranatha, St Egidio, YCW, Catholic Worker Movement, SVP, Pax Christi; there are so many others, like Church Action on Poverty, Christians Against Poverty, the Coventry Cathedral Cross of Nails Community and so on..

I've learned that much of what is going on in say, Evangelical networks is unknown to Catholic networks and vice-versa. There are so many blind spots between the different Christian traditions.

- My curiosity has led me to learn about the *explosion* over the past ten years, among the Evangelical movements of parish-based franchises – best known through organisations like Cinnamon Network and Jubilee Plus - supporting people out of debt and addiction, welcoming refugees, running job clubs, mentoring, night shelters, parenting and resilience, working with ex-offenders, counselling in the workplace, befriending, making lunch in the school holidays, and of course foodbanks – the best known franchise model is of course the Trussell Trust. Hugely effective work right across the country, all done by trained volunteer parishioners - deeply involved in communities, rebuilding, empowering people, one relationship at a time.

I've visited parishes becoming outward-facing in their neighbourhoods, intentionally reaching beyond their regular congregations, fostering *local leadership* among people who otherwise would be left behind.

- Take Anne Marie, who I mentioned earlier. Someone actually knocked on her door and asked if she wouldn't mind helping by baking a cake for a parish initiative called 'Crafternoon Teas'. She was astonished that anyone would want her help. But they said 'We need you.' It took two years for that cake to be baked. Having been so isolated it took time and patience, but her life is now transformed and she is empowered: she's leading a community project. This *asset-based community development (ABCD)* approach focuses on what she *can* do, not on what she *lacks*, not what *services* need to be provided for her, not on what *systems* need to be changed. This *relational* approach leads to material changes too.

We need to build a Common Good wherever we have the opportunity.

- I've met extraordinary people doing quiet, unglamorous work at local level, strengthening what Catholic social teaching calls the 'intermediate institutions' and the bonds between them. This means building up local clubs and associations - reclaiming responsibility and belonging, building back a sense of local pride;
- I've met clergy and laity coming together to re-think the uses of church land and buildings to provide affordable housing, offer space and support to local start-ups; and local people with skills and passion working together to start Community Land Trusts and Community Energy Trusts – helping to create sustainable futures in their local areas;
- I've come across countless small local small business owners whose faith or good will motivates extraordinary 24/7 dedication in their communities for very small margins;
- I've met people whose gift is to reconcile estranged groups – in workplaces, neighbourhoods, organisations. Mediating, keeping people in the room, building relationships where there is mistrust and suspicion: between left and right, marginalised and powerful, business and unions, faith and secular, sectarian groups, urban and rural, old and young, educated and uneducated, management and employees, tenants and landlords... We as Christians can be alert to these fractures and see where we can be a part of the solution.
- There are those whose calling is to use their role within organisations to re-humanise managerial systems that have lost their soul; in the workplace, fostering love and good relationships in the social care sector; being *more human* with the vulnerable and in one-size-fits-all bureaucratic processes. They know that helping one person in one way may not be the best way of helping another. It's a matter of getting to know people personally.

I'm coming across more and more Christians active in the movement to reshape the economy.

- From debt counsellors to impact investors – in many different ways, they are resisting the dominance of money and reforming this broken form of capitalism. They are showing it's possible to change the way the market works by *participating*; creating the world we want to live in through choices we make.
- There's the Just Finance Foundation, the Archbishop of Canterbury's initiative to create a fairer financial system including the Church Credit Champions network - teaching about money and debt in parishes, promoting good budgeting and savings culture in schools - and on target to bring in more than 3,000 credit union members by the end of the year. Since the challenge to Wonga started,

payday lending has declined by 68% - this shows the potential of the church to make a difference;

- I've met lay people building relationships between charities, business and investors and the communities and places that so desperately need inward investment. Like the Social Stock Exchange, with Christians of all denominations on the board, enabling investors to invest in companies with social and environmental missions - while also generating viable returns;
- I've met ShareAction who train ordinary people as investors, shareholders and savers to make the investment system a force for good;
- I've learned about the ethical banks, like Triodos and Oikocredit. And about the huge range of Responsible Finance providers making finance accessible to excluded communities;

Imagine if we *all* – not just the activists – banked ethically, and asked our providers if our pension is invested responsibly? How many of us are actually doing this?

- I've got to know CCLA and the Churches Investors Group who collectively invest billions on behalf of thousands of churches and charities. Whilst they do of course divest in some cases, they use their leverage in an approach of *engagement* rather than *divestment*. This is changing the behaviour of big companies such as Vodafone;
- And I've learned about the responsible business movement. People who take the risk to create wealth and jobs, whilst also honouring the dignity of labour and involving workers in decision making. It's not widely known that there are brands on the high street whose business models are making real headway;
 - like Timpsons, who intentionally employ ex offenders, Whitbread who recruit long term unemployed and of course John Lewis and other Quaker inspired models where workers participate;
 - Then there's the Blueprint Trust, initiated by Cardinal Nichols, which now six years on is well established and works with companies like KPMG and Centrica, bringing the principles of CST into the boardroom, translating it into an entirely secular, accessible set of principles,
 - The international B Corp movement – which is to business now what Fair Trade certification was to coffee. Established in the UK last year, it is growing fast,

- The purposeful entrepreneurship and *mission-led* business sector – there are many businesses operating on good principles, many of them led by Christians determined to put their principles into practice.

This is just a flavour – there is much more. There's a spectrum of effective ways of working for social justice. It's good to recognise what works, to affirm and celebrate all the ways.

While speaking truth to power is essential, its effectiveness depends on how it's done. Most people, in particular millennials, are disillusioned by the limited impact of the 'protest' approach and feel uncomfortable taking a politically 'tribal' position.

They want to be part of a *positive* story.

Much of civil society has become passive; we have become too reliant on 'the council' or 'the state' to fix things that in some cases might be done better by us, with the human and relational approach we can bring.

At the same time we have become too complacent that 'the market' is somehow 'out there' and outwith our influence, when in fact we are all market 'actors' with the ability to make change.

As a result too many of our communities have become dependent, deskilled and disempowered.

Many people are unaware of their own potential to make a difference, and that they can do so right where they are.

Much more of the responsibility can and should be taken by us, in whatever way our particular vocation and opportunities offer. We need to remember what 'participation' and 'subsidiarity' are supposed to be about.

This is what we mean by being 'agents of change for the Common Good' - linking our personal spiritual journeys with *how we live*.

How can we move away from the restricted view, and get everyone on board?

7. Why work together?

We'll be so much more effective when we link up with the approaches and gifts of other traditions and sectors.

What if we climbed out of our silos and worked together?

There are lots of reasons why we don't. Or why we don't want to.

It's a hassle. Collaboration is too time consuming. We are sceptical of unfamiliar approaches.

And what about the strange practices of other denominations? Different ways of praying: hands up / hands down!

We may strongly disagree politically. Let's face it we will always have suspicions and excuses.

But working ecumenically *and* cross-party is at the heart of our work. In our conversations with MPs I've seen at first hand how people of different traditions – in a closed room without the media present - have more in common than you might think. This is not about diluting conviction, the work of reconciliation is rigorous and often challenging - it's about negotiating with mutual respect.

As Christians we should not tolerate demonisation.

We should always be asking 'who are our allies' ...

We need each other's different gifts, connections, dispositions and expertise.

The 'Together' in the *Together for the Common Good* logo reminds us that as Christians, our *default* should be working across our differences.

The political landscape is changing hour by hour.

But in this turbulent time, our tradition doesn't change. It is mature. It transcends left and right. It's radically inclusive. We can help to create the conditions in which a new politics of the common good can grow.

The 'collaboration' in the logo reminds us that *first* we are collaborators with God. It's *his* plan not ours.

So I will leave you with these thoughts:

1. The icon tells speaks of the dignity of the human being *in relationship*. The human person is invited by his or her life to show forth the glory of God. Not to be reflected back at him or herself as in a hall of mirrors. He or she is more than the object of hand-outs. More than a commodity;
2. The mission of the church is bound up in the renewal of society. An outward-facing church - where the laity especially play a vital role linking spirituality with individual vocation - can rehumanise systems that have lost their soul, reshape the economy, encourage leadership among the poor, build community and reconcile estranged interests. The application of the principles of Catholic social

teaching (or 'Common Good Thinking') can be seen as 'the theology of the Holy Spirit in practice';

3. Working 'Together' and building relationships: the Trinity is our clue. Across beliefs, traditions, circumstances, and perspectives – we will find ourselves working with unlikely partners. In this critical time we need to be building alliances of good will, in humility: 'who can I work with to get this done? What skills do you have? Can you help me?' Vulnerability is a strength.

We should be asking:

'Lord, surprise me, show me who you want me to work with.'

This is the kind of church our country needs us to be. It is part of the route to a meaningful political, cultural and economic life.

I will leave you with this, one of the best expressions of the common good:

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

(Jeremiah 29.7)

© Jenny Sinclair

Jenny Sinclair is the daughter of the late Bishop David Sheppard, who had a celebrated ecumenical working partnership with Archbishop Derek Worlock and Free Church leaders in Liverpool a generation ago. Raised an Anglican, in her twenties she had a conversion experience and was received into the Catholic Church. In 2011 she felt moved to develop an idea and looked for allies. They founded the Together for the Common Good (T4CG) project, now an emerging movement aiming to bring alive the principle of the common good and make it more widely known and applied. T4CG encourages people of good will to act as agents of change and work together across their differences, for the Common Good.

For more information and to sign up to the free Together for the Common Good e-newsletter, please visit <http://www.togetherforthecommongood.co.uk>