

---

# Interview: Jenny Sinclair, Together for the Common Good project

by [Terence Handley MacMath](#)

Posted: 06 Dec 2013 @ 12:03

'We need to articulate a society that works for everyone'



**I'm responsible for my parents' legacy** [David and Grace Sheppard], which includes my father's archive, their publications, and the Better Together Trust. I also currently work 30 days a year representing the ecumenical Liverpool Hope University in London, visiting Anglican and Roman Catholic sixth-forms.

**Most of my time is spent working *pro bono* as secretary to the steering group of the Together for the Common Good project**, which is inspired by the partnership of the late Roman Catholic Archbishop Derek Worlock, and my late father, when he was Bishop of Liverpool [1975-97]. Theirs was a political friendship rooted in a shared faith. They set aside their doctrinal differences and dedicated themselves to working together alongside communities in Liverpool.

**After my mother died**, people were asking me: "What would David and Derek have said about our society today?" I wondered if their Better Together legacy still had some currency. I sensed a pull that I should pursue something about the intersection of social justice and ecumenism.

**There's a great hunger for a new narrative based on the common good.** We need to articulate a society that works for everyone. So we're exploring how the different Christian traditions, other faith communities, and secular allies can work more effectively together for social justice.

**We're seeing the gap between the very rich, and those with the least widen further and faster in recent years.** People are cynical, and have lost faith in institutions. The economic system we have is geared to enable those who already have money get even more. The market's become too powerful, but so has the state. The way to rebalance this is by civil society taking back some of that power.

**The Churches, and faith-based organisations in particular, are well-placed to help facilitate this** because their networks are so effective and close to communities - and because, at heart, our faith is all about a commitment to the common good. This has the potential to transcend party politics and bring a diversity of interests into convergence.

**We need to be having the best possible conversations about what the common good looks like.** For example, what would a housing policy for the common good look like?

**The Together for the Common Good project is independent**, guided by a steering group of six people: Nicholas Sagovsky, Bishop Stephen Platten, Hilary Russell, Tim Livesey, Peter McGrail, and myself - three Anglicans and three Roman Catholics. We aren't an organisation, and that's deliberate. Our original two-year plan involves a 12-month programme of research, a website, a conference, and a book on the Common Good planned for early 2015.

**I've never worked in the Church**, or in the social-justice field; so I didn't feel at all prepared. I have felt out of depth a great deal. On the other hand, it's as if my whole life-experience has been useful preparation, and I've begun to see that sometimes coming from a position of weakness can be a strength. I'm not embarrassed to ask the naïve questions. I can see that my "outsider" questioning has triggered some new thinking in others who are old hands in the field. It's been helpful that I understand a bit about both the Anglican and the Catholic ways of

doing things.

**I've always been a "doer", and I like a challenge.** Rather than having a conventional career, I've done different things: worked in business, the visual arts, run a charity, made short films, worked on campaigns. I've experience of organising events and relationship management.

**I like bringing people together.** I've a strong sense of curiosity, and need to make sense of what's going on. I know a very broad range of people, and I try to see things from different angles.

**It's heartening to have hit on a spot,** by the grace of God, that resonates with so many people, and to realise the huge potential in this. I'm thankful that so many people are praying for the project.

**Sometimes I get discouraged when progress is slow,** or when clarity is elusive. I'm a slogger - I'll work for as long as it takes to get a job done well. I get frustrated with the amount of time that gets eaten up with writing grant applications.

**I'm an only child,** and close to a handful of my relatives. My husband and I have been married for 25 years, and we have two wonderful sons who are 13 and 15.

**I'm proudest of my children,** but they're not an achievement, they're a gift. What gives me most satisfaction recently is trusting my instincts about Together for the Common Good. There were times when I could easily have walked away from it.

**My earliest years were in Canning Town,** in London's East End, where we lived in community at the Mayflower Family Centre. Then we lived in Peckham, south-east London, until I was 13. We moved north when my father became Bishop of Liverpool.

**Growing up in a clergy home was very public,** and so I sought privacy in adulthood. I was close to my parents, though as a teenager I found being the bishop's daughter rather trying. I know my resistance was a worry at times. I became familiar with the "backstage" view of the Church. Conversation round the kitchen table often focused on current affairs and social-justice issues.

**I was conscious of my mother's agoraphobia for most of my childhood.** We were very proud of her when she overcame it and wrote *An Aspect of Fear* and later *Living With Dying*. She surprised us all, and her ministry touched the lives of many people. I understood her better after I became a mother myself, and we became very close in her last few years.

**Her dying was a transformational experience for me.** I've been blessed to have had no sense of loss after my parents died. I feel they are still around, as well as others I've known who have gone on to the fullness of life.

**I'm very forward-looking,** and accept the life that God is unfolding for me, even when it is difficult. I'm very self-critical, but I don't live with regret, and I am not sentimental or nostalgic. My mistakes have been numerous but useful, and they've formed who I am.

**I do regret losing a large oil painting by my father painted in the 1960s.** It's an inner-city East London scene at sunset. It has a gritty romantic realism, with people in the foreground and a council estate behind - a powerful illustration of his passion for human dignity. Someone somewhere has it, and I hope it will turn up.

**Fr Michael Hollings influenced me deeply.** When I became a Roman Catholic, in 1988, he said: "Welcome to the world of happiness and tragedy." It was several years before I understood what this means. It's a long, mystical process that will continue unfolding until my life is complete. My favourite part of the liturgy is "I am not worthy to receive you - only say the word and I shall be healed."

**I have lots of favourite music** - very diverse: Allegri's *Miserere mei*; "Jesus", by the Velvet Underground; ambient music by Harold Budd; Karl Jenkins's *The Armed Man*. I like the sound of silence in the middle of the night.

**Jeremiah 29.7 interests me:** "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

**The worst thing is when people are aware of injustice, but do nothing.** I am angry that the dignity of the human person is degraded every day by poverty, worklessness, the mainstreaming of pornographic imagery, inequality, consumerism - by the supremacy of profit over humanity.

**I'm happiest with my family.** But also in my work when I'm open to the grace of God, and not being obstructive or obtuse; when I'm working with others on a common goal; when I'm clear about what I'm doing; and when I meet people and come across clues which feel heaven-sent.

**"Teach me, show me, never let me be parted from you."** My prayers are often conversational. I often ask for instructions: "Lord, please show me the way," "send me a clue,"

etc. I also use the traditional prayers often, like the Hail Mary, Our Father, Glory Be.

**I'd like to be locked in a church with a gospel choir.**

*Jenny Sinclair was talking to Terence Handley MacMath.*

*<http://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk>*