

*This talk was given at the Annual Justice and Peace Assembly, Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, on 28 January 2017. The theme was Am I a good neighbour? Globalisation and the Fair Society.*

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## **Good Neighbours and the Common Good**

Jenny Sinclair



Rublev's Icon of the Holy Trinity (Св. Троицы)

Good morning everyone - it's an honour to be here.

Building on Fr Augusto's presentation earlier, I've been asked to look at our theme from a different angle. I'm going to look at what it might take to be a good neighbour in this time of polarisation and division. We'll explore what's behind our broken relationships, what's needed to achieve justice and a social peace. We'll see how people across the churches can be part of the solution and I'll share some of what I've learned since starting *Together for the Common Good*.

We'll find nourishment in the Trinity - I'm sure you know this wonderful 14<sup>th</sup> Century Russian icon by Rublev, it will be our backdrop.

### **Where are we now?**

'*Them and Us*' seems to be the dominant theme just now. But let's be clear, the conditions that caused this have been a long time in the making.

I thought we'd start with St Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where he says:

*"Tell each other the truth, because we all belong to each other in the same body."*

Whether we like it or not: we all belong to each other. Every human being is made in the image of God. It's time to listen to people whose experiences are different from ours.

So many people didn't see Brexit and Trump coming. Some are still unclear about what's going on. The causes have been building for years. They are symptoms of our broken body. So how and why have these estrangements developed?

The Remain and Clinton campaigns were predicated on economics, indeed the same liberal economic model that has been dominant for years across successive governments. This is why the offer was meaningless for those who were left behind. For them, *more of the same* was the last thing they wanted. They wanted something more meaningful.

For too long, a 'progressive' agenda has held people with traditional views *in contempt*.

This touches many groups, but in particular, communities from the old industrial heartlands, who have been ignored for years, discarded by the economic model. They felt patronised and insulted.

And when people from proud, inherited cultures experience *humiliation and powerlessness* they will eventually respond.

So when a rare opportunity to be heard came up, they took it, even *if they knew* the campaigns were deeply flawed.

They were tired of being offered choices between being a few pounds worse or better off. What was benefitting the global establishment never reached their door.

They were suspicious of 'the truth' which never rang true *for them* while their infrastructure was in a state of degradation and the dignity that work can offer was fast becoming a memory.

They lost patience as social norms changed without their consent. They feel exiled in their own country.

The pollsters and media missed what was happening – because this 'basket of deplorables' had been *shamed* into hiding their views.

How could the mainstream media (including the BBC) be so incapable of seeing what was going on? Why is it still in some cases unable to get beyond the dominant 'groupthink'?

A certain brand of liberalism has, over many years, achieved such blanket coverage that for those in the middle of it, it is almost *impossible to conceive that anyone might see the world in a different way*.

Large numbers of people had felt inhibited and unable to raise legitimate concerns - about the rapid pace of immigration, economic mismanagement and culture change - that they were effectively silenced, excluded.

*No wonder* a rough, sensationalist, reality TV vernacular broke through the political permafrost. Outlandish and brutish ideas yes, but the tone was what resonated: the anger confirmed that what they have been living through was finally being recognised.

In hindsight these seismic democratic gestures seem an inevitable response.

Now we are all on our guard, we are watching what comes next. We should be vigilant and suspicious.

### **What's going on**

To be Good Neighbours we may need to ask some tough questions.

Could it be true that the free movement of people *has* been in the interests of big business, commodifying labour, keeping wages low, running roughshod over the fragility of local communities and cultures? Sucking the brightest and strongest away from their places of belonging, adding further strength to the dynamic metropolitan centres but meanwhile entrenching communities of the left behind?

Could it be true that a focus on diversity distracts us from economic inequality?

Could it be true that the EU's founding principle of subsidiarity has been allowed to drift?

Could it be true that the culture of political correctness has made people afraid to speak the truth?

Professor Arlie Hochschild of Berkeley has researched what she calls a 'deep story' that captures how people who have been overlooked felt as globalisation took hold. A deep story is how life feels, what *feels* true:

*"You're waiting in a queue, like in a pilgrimage, and you're facing up a hill, at the top of which is your aspiration. And you've been waiting there for a long time. Your feet are tired. You have a tremendous sense of deserving. You've done everything right: you've followed the rules and worked hard. But the queue is not moving. And then you begin to see some people cutting in ahead of you. Who are they? Well, they're people from other countries who now have access to jobs that traditionally were reserved for your neighbours and relatives. Not only that, but you can see ahead of you women who now have access to jobs that used to be typically for men. Even the rights of the hunted fox gets attention before you. And then, you see Cameron, Blair, Obama, Clinton, in this deep story, beckoning to the queue jumpers – in fact, they're sponsoring them. Something is rigged here.*

*And so the very idea of government came to seem like an instrument of your own marginalisation. Then, in this deep story, someone who is ahead of you in the queue, turns around and says: 'You bigots, you backward rednecks.'*

Some of Hochschild's colleagues scorned her approach. "You better watch out and not empathise too much, *it might change you.*" As if listening to another perspective could infect your orthodoxy. Their contemptuous attitude betrays *exactly* why we are where we are now.

So now that the fragmented, unequal and divided reality is laid bare (let's be clear it was already there, it has just been exposed), we need to work out what we can do to be Good Neighbours and build back the broken body.

### **Examination of conscience**

But before judging politicians or anybody else, we should start with our own examination of conscience.

The Beatitudes teach that the poor in spirit are blessed. The Church does its best to honour this.

But 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 she'd come across were more interested in campaigning about 'justice' or raising money for overseas charities than in people like her right on their doorstep.

This is how Anne Marie experienced the Church.

Can we ask the difficult question, if some of us in the Church have been swept along and, inadvertently perhaps, focused more on the needs and interests of the destitute or of refugees or migrants or other minority groups, and *overlooked the interests* of the struggling working class families in our own neighbourhoods? Let's be clear: it's not a matter of either/or, it's both/and.

Let's look at the relationship of the Church with 'the poor'

*Faith in the City*, published over a generation ago, focused on "communities of the left behind." It 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."*

But if our notion of justice means speaking truth to power as a way of avoiding personal relationships with, and loving, people who are excluded, then we might as well pack up and go home.

We hear a lot in the churches about giving a *voice to the voiceless*; rather less about giving them the opportunity to speak for themselves. Well, now they have spoken.

In any case, what and who do we mean by 'the poor'?

In Pope Francis' theological tradition, sometimes called the Theology of the People, the term 'poor' refers to people who live with the experience of *non-power*. This can be economic but also social, material, relational, educational, spiritual.

Someone who is living with the experience of non-power has a sense of their need for other human beings. The awareness of needing others, the yearning for love and belonging. The opposite of individualism. That is a very profound truth and a beautiful thing, which is why Francis says the church must be not only *for* the poor, but *of* the poor.

He says if the Holy Spirit is set free among the poor, this is how the Church *itself* will be transformed.

Vulnerability and humility are qualities to be treasured: these are qualities often found in people who are excluded and ignored.

Estranged from those who experience non-power, we are all impoverished, less human. And we exclude the possibility of what they can contribute.

But people who are poor don't always appear to be 'deserving'. Their traditions, opinions and cultures may cut across what we are used to.

Can the church really welcome everyone who is experiencing non power? What about people in Stoke or Sunderland who voted UKIP? Or is it easier to prioritise minority groups, refugees and the destitute? Sure, some people are hard to love. But by ranking their poverty we risk impoverishing ourselves.

A truly Common Good approach would recognise all the groups who experience non-power - ethnic and social - all of them. It is not a zero sum game. It's not Either/Or, it's Both/And.

Rowan Williams says when we meet another person we are on sacred ground.

Jean Vanier understands that to be fully human, we need to be in a relationship with the excluded, no matter how difficult that may be.

Who are we called to love?

Jean's experience with profoundly disabled people has taught him that humiliation can lead to anger, and sometimes, to violence. Those with no power may well be angry.

But he talks about the 'gift of the poor'. He says it is often they who are free enough to show, with the greatest clarity the needs, beauty and pain of the whole community.

Shaming them even further into silence will eventually hurt us all.

So being a Good Neighbour involves respect and listening. It is how we ourselves will be transformed.

### **From crisis to opportunity**

Whether we like it or not, we are all members of one body.

And it is possible for intelligent people to come to different conclusions.

The major theme of that letter to the Ephesians is the unity and reconciliation of the whole of creation through the agency of the Church.

The challenge of St Paul brings with it the potential for the healing of the broken body of our society into convergence with the mission of the Church. Think about that for a second.

This moment of political turmoil is an opportunity. A new settlement is being formed: if it isn't founded on a relationship with, and respect for, the excluded, then our democracy will remain in crisis. Similarly, if the Church does not reform its relationship with the poor too, it overlooks the very person of Jesus and will be destined for a sterile internal conversation and its mission will fail.

So let's talk about the Common Good.

### **The Common Good**

We all think we know what it means. The idea resonates from Aristotle, to Ubuntu, Shalom, across humanist, Jewish, Christian and other traditions.

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

But the Common Good is not a utopian ideal to be imposed by one enlightened group upon another.

It is something we create.

It's *how* that set of conditions is created that is the crucial question – the conditions need to be built *by us*, working together across our differences. It requires unlikely partnerships. It is something we create in common across our different interests.

So we can talk about the *practice of the Common Good*. Something we *do*.

To build a Common Good requires people who may seriously disagree, and whose interests and circumstances are different, to listen to each other, tell each other the truth, encounter each other in *relationship*.

Simply put, 'it is in my interests that you thrive.'

At Together for the Common Good, we draw from across the Judeo Christian traditions and in particular, from the principles of Catholic Social Teaching – the principles you probably know, but they are worth naming: 'the primacy of the human person, human dignity, the dignity of work, the Common Good, equality, respect for life, reconciliation, subsidiarity, solidarity, participation, association, and the preferential option for the poor', they are all important and are meant to be used together. Also, Catholic Social Teaching helps us understand the importance of intermediate institutions - the clubs, associations, guilds, churches, and so on, the organisations that make up civil society but are not part of the state.

So we are finding these principles resonate across other traditions too, because they are so human: together they are a powerful recipe for building a common life.

They offer a process of discernment – they are not policy prescriptive. When properly balanced they transcend partisan positions and reject both neoliberal and big state ideologies - as both have a tendency to dehumanise. This is a way of seeing human reality anchored in deep experience and in tenderness.

This body of thinking comes out of learned experience - knowing the reality of how people live, knowing the messiness of human life.

We describe it as 'Common Good Thinking'.

We want to see this way of thinking widely applied, from the grassroots to the boardroom.

Our inspiration for this comes from an unlikely partnership.

### **Together for the Common Good**

*Together for the Common Good* began as an idea of mine in 2011. I can only describe what happened as a movement of the Spirit, pulling me onto a completely different path. Having grown up the daughter of an Anglican bishop, I had been ploughing my own furrow, rebelling a bit. Then living a quiet, ordinary life, working in graphic design, some volunteering and raising a family. Then suddenly, for the first time since my conversion to the Catholic faith 20 years before, I felt I was being called. My 'hidden journey' was breaking through.

I found myself drawing a cross, formed of the words ecumenism and social justice, and the intersection seemed to be saying to me *reconciliation*. So I prayed about it: I wasn't sure what it was saying to me, but that is how I felt.

This was the first time I felt drawn to learn about the partnership between my late father Bishop David Sheppard and Archbishop Derek Worlock. I found it still had currency, not just for church leaders - but now, for all of us.

They learned from each other, realising that their different gifts were complementary. Gifts like Catholic Social Teaching, the 'see-judge-act' methodology, the outward facing church, the Anglican tradition of hospitality to, and care for, the whole nation, courage and negotiating skills.

For twenty years they worked together across *their* differences, putting the city of Liverpool first in a time of polarisation and division. If they could do it, so can we.

They encouraged *local leadership, leadership of the poor*, among 'communities of the left behind.'

They built bridges between mutually suspicious groups.



Listening to all sides, and interpreting between them – business, unions, Catholic, Protestant, the affluent, the left behind, the police, the black community, the Militant Tendency, the Thatcher government...

...their method for building Common Good was *reconciliation*.

So for *Together for the Common Good*, for us this means acting as a catalyst, being firmly non-partisan and ecumenical, building relationships, promoting Common Good Thinking and practice, holding Common Good conversations and debates; assisting others through our publications, and forthcoming training resources. We share information through our website, Twitter and our free newsletter. It's all held by a tiny core team of two plus many associates working pro bono on our programmes, along with our circle of advisers. We punch above our weight thanks to our many partnerships and alliances.

*We want people of good will to work together*, across their beliefs and political differences for the Common Good. We look for unlikely allies and partnerships.

Following the Sheppard-Worlock tradition we want to see relationships of shared purpose flourish between the many different and estranged Christian traditions *as an example to all* that it is possible to live together even though we disagree.

The church should be known for being good at relationships.

In this context, those who choose to be tribal - contemptuous of others - whether politically, religiously or culturally – are not Good Neighbours. We must resist tribalism and be willing to hear the truth as others see it - receive the gift of the other.

The goal of totalitarianism, as Orwell said, is to destroy our 'common basis of agreement.'

Being a Good Neighbour is to refuse to be tribal. It is to have the courage to make the unattractive choices – to mix with those our own crowd rejects.

### **An honest people, honest brokers**

So – Brexit, Trump – these are symptoms of a deep realignment still unfolding - with more to come. The old left and right orthodoxies are shifting.

*Reconciliation is very important now.*

This is too big a task to leave to politicians. If we are to heal this broken body, we must protect freedom of speech, we must have the capacity to talk about awful things – and foster a culture of listening especially to those who have been shamed into silence. We must be clear about right and wrong, and not be afraid to say we have changed our minds.

People in the churches who were for Remain need to be careful not to be swept along by sentimental cosmopolitan attitudes of self-righteous indignation. They should be careful not to be sucked into any snobbery about the uneducated. That way is a very dangerous road, and risks provoking a more sinister reaction. Remember the people who voted for Brexit are genuinely delighted.

One thing's for sure: if we're not looking for common ground, we're not going to find it.

That's why I shared Hochschild's deep story with you earlier. She has that reconciliatory, neighbourly instinct I am talking about. A Clinton supporter with the humility and curiosity - and courage - to get to know Trump supporters who she thought she had nothing in common with. She found that *empathy* bridged the divide, they had common ground, indeed she found the experience enlarging and enriching. In spite of the scorn of her colleagues.

The churches and their people are well-placed to do this, to foster a culture of encounter, as honest brokers. Not only around Brexit divisions but other fractures too.

We need to make the effort to get out of our echo chambers. Say, intentionally reading news from different sources, asking advice from someone you know disagrees with you, subverting the social media algorithms which dangerously make interaction *less* likely with people different from ourselves.

Can we be the ones who persuade people to 'stay in the room', and keep the dialogue going, recognising the humanity in everyone, and affirm the legitimacy of what they have to say?

### **What kind of church**

We are being called to heal the broken body, to witness the mystery of the Trinity. We know the reality of human identity is intimately bound up in our relationship with God and with others.

Have you had that feeling of being totally loved by God? That feeling of forgiveness?

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

This is the kind of church Pope Francis has been asking us to be since *Evangelii Gaudium* and of course in *Laudato Si'*.

This is the kind of outward-facing church Sheppard and Worlock embodied a generation ago.

They listened to mutually suspicious and hostile groups and brought people together. No politically correct silencing going on there.

They refused to be tribal. It is not easy. They were branded statist by the Thatcherite right. And as traitors by the hard left.

They worked with business, encouraging their crucial role for the Common Good.

They empowered *local leadership* in 'communities of the left behind', affirming their cultures - not trying to change them or impose a different culture on them. They worked alongside people, not doing *to* but working *with*, building up their capacity.

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

They were loyal to their own traditions: no syncretism there. They never took communion together in over 20 years.

We encourage similar ecumenical collaboration now, not just between church leaders but between lay people especially. Of course there are lots of reasons why you wouldn't want to: there are so many mutual suspicions!

But we do this because we know how effective it can be, and how powerful a witness it is when people who believe very different things or come from different backgrounds decide to work together for the Common Good. We practise what we preach: all our projects are led by ecumenical working groups.

### **Building a common life**

So what should this look like today? How can we build a common life? In practical terms...

To build a common life and a social peace requires widespread relationship building on a personal level as well as the strategic work: a holistic and integrated approach. But we need to be aware that too often people of goodwill are put off by angry campaigns and don't want to be part of a politicised, tribal approach: be careful not to lose their contribution.

So, to build a common life we need to open up this space and make it possible for everyone to uncover their unique role - there is a multiplicity of ways. When this is linked with our spiritual life so much more creativity is released. So for this reason I'd say don't rush to action, better to start in quiet contemplation, pray with the Trinity and ask to be guided where you can best serve, and who you are called to work with.

It can be so encouraging to learn from others. Part of my work involves looking across the silos of the different Christian traditions (surprisingly ignorant of what each other are doing), to identify where the Spirit is at work through people who are applying the principles – consciously or unconsciously - and building the Common Good. They are strengthening civil society to balance

the power of big money and the big state. We have lost a lot of the strength that communities used to hold, we have given this up over the last 50 years. We need to reclaim it.

I share what I find in our regular newsletter. Let me tell you some examples, let's make this specific. Good Neighbours. Love into action.

I have found people choosing to live in the tough estates, the abandoned towns, building the kingdom within 'communities of the left behind.' For them, the Brexit and Trump phenomena were no surprise. These are people embedded, raising their kids, *choosing not to leave* when metropolitan temptations beckon;

I have found those who understand the importance of working *alongside*, rather than *speaking for* people who are struggling; moving from handouts to a hand up approach;

There are those who bring together victims and perpetrators of hate crime in reconciliation; those bravely challenging Islamic fundamentalists in their communities; supporting vulnerable Muslim women, helping them learn English;

There are those who are re-orienting their churches to face outwards, re-purposing under-used church land and buildings to provide affordable housing, or community use, or space for local start-ups;

There are the thousands serving in food banks, credit unions, homeless shelters, those opening their homes for weekly neighbourhood dinners; they know the families in the struggling communities *personally*;

There are the generous souls who dedicate themselves to supporting traumatised refugees and asylum seekers, helping them settle, find their feet and build relationships in the community;

There are those running community land trusts, community energy trusts and community banks, whose efforts are reshaping land values, challenging the big banks and energy companies;

There are the impressive franchise programmes, largely in the evangelical sector, where thousands of volunteer lay people serve communities in addiction support, parenting, debt counselling, job clubs, street angels, ex-offenders, mentoring and befriending.

Less obvious perhaps are those who sustain the 'intermediate institutions' - the often fragile local clubs and associations, and building the bonds between them that strengthen civil society;

That neighbourly instinct is also at work in those actively reshaping the economy - through financial inclusion initiatives, credit union networks, cleaning supply chains, to the ethical

investment firms, the reform of shareholder behaviour - people moving their money from pensions funds that aren't invested ethically, and the fast-growing impact investment sector: these are people motivated by their faith and they are showing it's possible to make the market work for social good by *participation*;

We can also see this reconciliatory instinct at work in the entrepreneurs driving the 'mission-led business' agenda, pioneers proving it's possible to be successful and create jobs as well as honouring the dignity of their workforce while also producing socially and environmentally responsible products and services: very much Both/And.

There are those who realise the importance of beauty, caring for our countryside, fields, forests, ancient hedgerows; caring for our green spaces in cities;

There are those enabling young people to take responsibility for leadership in challenging neighbourhoods; and teachers striving to bring Common Good values into the classroom; those trying to change the higher education system which has so dishonoured the poor and driven a division between the educated and the uneducated;

There are those for whom their vocation means challenging managerialism and rehumanising the social care sector; those working to overcome the blight of loneliness and bringing love, tenderness and kindness into *systems that have lost their soul*.

I could go on. These are just a few examples. Think how much more can be released if we all started to think in this way - through the lens of the common good - and link our actions with our spirituality.

### **Our calling**

All of this is being done by the people across the churches. We are custodians of values that are transformational: values of love, hope, responsibility, human dignity, respect for life, family, community, relationships – and rootedness in place. We should be thinking about these values and applying them seven days a week.

The political landscape is changing hour by hour. But the tradition of the Common Good is mature. Transcends left and right. Properly understood it is never sectarian: it is radically inclusive.

Let's be clear again: the Common Good is not a utopian ideal to be imposed by one enlightened group upon another. It needs to be built, in relationship - with people with whom we may disagree.

What will the church be known for? Rituals or relationships?

In this increasingly secular context, let's be clear about that: what will we be known for?

We should be clear about our centre of gravity: each of us is invited to enter into a relationship with the Father, with Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. Root everything we do in prayer. We can ask 'Lord, show me who you want me to work with.' ....and then take the consequences!

It's our *calling* to be Good Neighbours: to be a people capable of witnessing what it really means to be a human person. To build a common life together: *both* globally, *and* locally too.

It is in all our interests that everyone thrives.

I'll leave you with this passage from Jeremiah – perhaps the best expression from the Bible about the Common Good.

Thank you.

*'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)

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*This was the second of two talks on the day: the first was given by Fr Augusto Zampini Davies on integral ecology and the Common Good: the challenge of Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si'.*

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**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>**