



CITYtheology

THE MAGAZINE OF THE LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE

**CAN THE
RALLYING CRY
FOR CLIMATE
JUSTICE MAGNIFY
HOPE FOR LONG
TERM CHANGE?**

**WHAT CRISIS,
WHAT INVASION?**

**SEARCHING FOR
TRUTH AND JUSTICE
ABOUT THE
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**DO YOU
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COUNTRY**

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WELCOME TO CityTheology

The collection of articles and the earth- and city-inspired visuals in this edition of CITYtheology aim to support engagement with current issues around hospitality, inclusion and sanctuary.

Our lead article was written by Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal who has been actively campaigning on issues around the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees for the last quarter of a century. Drawing on his depth of knowledge and offering critical analysis of the current situation, Inderjit challenges readers to think globally and locally, as citizens and as Christians.

Katherine Hogg's article on 'sad goodbyes' is closely linked with Inderjit's. She shares a glimpse of a resource designed to nurture a spirit of welcome and practices of sanctuary in Leeds schools. While the resource itself is geared to a young person's perspective, the questions it raises give adult readers food for thought.

Bronagh Daly's article is the fruit of sustained reflection on the Magnificat and listening to the 'cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth'. It telescopes in time from Mary to women in Leeds today who also seek to magnify hope and bring about real change. It expresses the strong theological position that shapes Bronagh's work at Leeds Church Institute as Faith and Creativity Lead.

And, further, on the theme of bringing about change, Paul Coleman's article witnesses to the powerful voice of young people heard in Leeds. You are invited to rejoice with Paul and others at the positive impact of young people's leadership.

As editor, I have found working on this edition of CITYtheology has left me feeling challenged by the impact of the 'hostile environment' created around borders but hopeful for real change. I would be pleased to hear from readers about what you feel you have learnt or what has perhaps struck a chord with you in this magazine.

Dr Helen Reid, Director of Leeds Church Institute

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE REMOVED ALL THE STORIES IN THE BIBLE THAT DEAL WITH TRAVELLING AND JOURNEYS?

Dr Paul Coleman, Faith at the Margins Lead for Leeds Church Institute, reflects on bus journeys and journeys for justice.

If we did remove stories about travelling and journeys from the Bible, I imagine there would not be a lot left at all. This would be especially so if we included not just physical journeys, but also the journeying of a people, and journeys towards justice and greater understanding.

The same might be true for the stories of our lives in Leeds, especially for those of us who travel for education, work and leisure. So much of our daily life is made up of journeys from one part of the city to another. These are journeys where we encounter people from all walks of life. Journeys that we all want to take place safely and on time.

Whilst I rarely, if ever, share a bus journey with school pupils nor any of the groups involved with Leeds Citizens, I am nonetheless excited to join them on a journey of social justice. A journey that can help to improve life for everyone travelling in and around Leeds.

Leeds Citizens is an alliance of faith, education and community organisations, working together for the common good of Leeds. They journey alongside local communities guiding them through the wilderness of political red tape. Through acts of solidarity, local campaigners feel protected from the storm of debate and inaction. Shouts of rejoice are commonplace at

Leeds Citizens meetings and gatherings to celebrate action wins that promote social justice.

Leeds Church Institute is a Principal Partner with Leeds Citizens. In March this year, at their annual Delegates Assembly, I was appointed to the Leeds Citizens Leadership Team. Whilst I had already gained an introduction as to what Leeds Citizens is all about, becoming involved with its strategic planning allowed me, for the first time, to honestly say I understood how Community Organising works on a local level.

As part of the Assembly, we heard stories of actions undertaken by different groups across the city. One particular story, of a campaign undertaken by pupils from Carr Manor Community School in relation to problems getting to and from school using public buses, impacted me. Students spoke about the difficulties of bullying on the bus, as well as getting to and from school when the buses are late or didn't turn up at all, which then caused them to arrive late or miss important lessons. They spoke of the lack of a dedicated school bus service, and their concerns over safety while traveling to and from school on public buses. The students called on representatives of West Yorkshire Police, First Bus Leeds and the Mayor of West Yorkshire, who were present, to make some specific changes.

Hearing their stories brought to mind my own experiences of bullying on school buses as a teenager. I only caught a bus when it was unavoidable. I never really challenged the issues that had caused me to see the school bus as an unreliable mode of transport, and I reconciled myself to cycling to school instead. So I was impressed by the way the students were using the tools of Community Organising, and solidarity from Leeds Citizens, to speak out on issues that have a massive impact on all those who rely on public transport every day.

In May, Leeds Citizens and the pupils from Carr Manor Community School

were able to rejoice together, and celebrate their 'campaign win' when First Bus agreed to set up a new dedicated school bus service, as well as to revise key bus times to fit the school day. They also promised to develop a new app to enable students to safely report issues on the buses, and this is awaited with great hope.

Leeds Citizens continues to campaign for better buses in Leeds and across West Yorkshire. This huge win was followed by a meeting with Tracy Brabin, the Mayor of West Yorkshire, and a team made up of schools, churches and community organisations from across Leeds and Bradford. At this meeting we heard more stories from schools and other organisations, about problems with bus reliability, the high cost of fares, particularly the cost of student bus tickets for families with multiple children in school. This can easily come to over £1000 per year, simply to get to school, an expense which can be difficult to meet, especially due to the current increases in the cost of living. We also heard stories of bullying, as well as racial and disability discrimination on Leeds buses.

Clearly the challenges of physical journeys around Leeds are loaded with justice issues, and the actions of Leeds Citizens truly are focussed on journeying to justice.

There is a blessing I have used over the years, from the Northumbria community, about safe passage through difficult times. It offers an opportunity to reflect on the way this group of young people has organised themselves.

*May the peace of the Lord Christ
go with you,
wherever He may send you.
May He guide you through the
wilderness,
protect you through the storm.
May He bring you home rejoicing,
at the wonders He has shown you.
May He bring you home rejoicing,
once again into our doors.*



WHAT CRISIS, WHAT INVASION?

SEARCHING FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE ABOUT THE MOVEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT OF PEOPLE IN THE UK



Inderjit Bhogal, former President of the British Methodist Conference and Founder of the City of Sanctuary network and movement, reflects theologically on the case for compassion at national borders and in our cities.

Way back in 1951, the UK was among one hundred and forty-seven countries that signed the UN Refugee Convention in the context of millions of people made homeless by World War Two. The Convention defines who a refugee is, but it does not distinguish between “asylum seekers” and “refugees”. It also tells us that refugees should be protected without discrimination, and that they should not be returned to face persecution. It further makes clear that international cooperation is required to protect refugees.

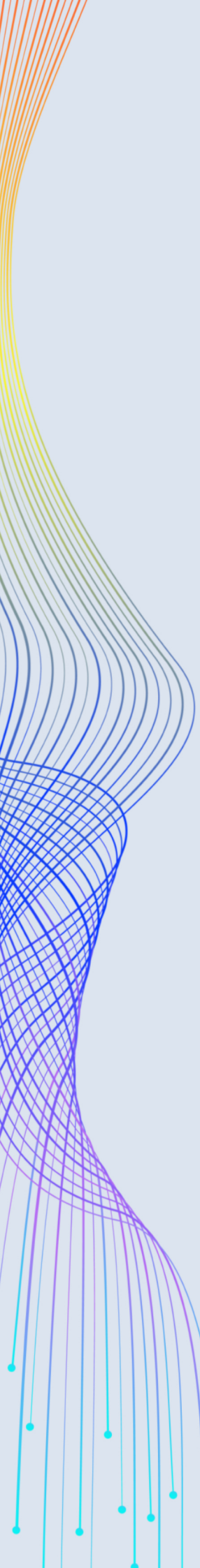
Fast forward to today.

Applying for “asylum” is not a crime, but criminalising people for trying to get to a safe place is a crime against humanity. Detaining and deporting people without considering their story and claim is immoral and unethical.

Alongside this, consider that Germany, France and Spain each receive more people seeking sanctuary each year than does the UK. According to the Oxford University’s Migration Observatory, 56,495 people claimed asylum in the UK in 2021 compared to 103,081 in 2002.

I believe that this series of statements shows how current use of the language of “crisis” and “invasion” misrepresents the reality. It is also unhelpful in the context and only serves to legitimise hatred and hate speech. The numbers of people seeking sanctuary in the UK is small. Images of people arriving on the shores of Kent do not give the full picture.

This is not an ‘invasion’ or ‘crisis’.



The UK Nationality and Borders Bill and the current Illegal Migration Bill plan to stop people arriving in the UK on small boats seeking sanctuary. In this way, the bills contravene the 1951 UN Refugee Convention to which the UK remains a signatory. Under the Convention, applying for asylum is a legitimate right which is not affected by the mode of travel.

The Refugee Convention has saved millions of lives. However, it was drafted seventy-two years ago, and is not a perfect instrument. It does not, for example, extend protection to people fleeing war, genocide, famine, domestic violence or extreme weather. Nor does it offer protection to trafficked women, children and men. Today, we need a broader definition of who is a refugee given current changes arising from conflict and climate change.

Crossing borders is nothing new. To move for personal, social and economic reasons, and to seek safety and security is part of being human. The Bible is a story of a people on the move, in exile, and a migrant God.

There are no insurmountable obstacles or borders, be they hostile environments of deserts, seas or humans. People still move and migrate. Migration is in the purposes of God.

Borders, as understood today, are a relatively recent creation. Most borders were formed after World War Two, and individual nations did not decide their own borders in isolation. Moreover, in practice, there are neither completely open or completely sealed borders. In the European Union borders are open between member states. “Brexit” was, in part, a rejection of this arrangement in British politics in order to “take control of our own borders”. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that we are not in control of our own borders. This is despite nations assigning huge budgets to immigration and border control. For example, the UK Home Office paid France £54million in 2021 to police the Channel, with more pledged recently, and up to the end of October 2022 had spent £130million on the so-called Rwanda policy.

What is happening at national borders reveals the broken points of the world.

Borders can be points where nations can meet and explore shared responses, and ways to manage migration. God speaks to humanity from these open wounds and visible scars, calling for justice, mercy and humility, and building human connection.

There is a growing challenge to this hostile environment around borders, not least from those who see greater freedom-of-movement across borders as the way ahead. This includes well-researched and well-reasoned calls for more open borders on the basis that migration is an essential part of being human, will increase in the future, and is a solution not a problem.

Opening borders is not about abolishing them, but rather accepting immigrants at ports of entry with compassion and not cruelty.

Recognising we have become a planet on the move, we need policies which are not focussed on preventing migration, but rather providing strategies for dealing with the inevitable and integrating new arrivals more successfully and humanely.

Human beings search for safety and stability. Mass migration is essential and the best way forward for humanity in a globally warmer world. In this scenario human beings will do what they have always done throughout history, and that is to move. But this time, on a scale not seen before. Most of these migrants will move to cooler northern and southern regions. The biggest obstacle to movement of people today is represented by borders.

Theologian Gemma Tulud makes a coherent and compassionate case for theological reflection on migration, exploring the positive dimensions of migration and migrants. Working from a theology of “one bread, one body, one people” she argues for social justice in immigration.

What this means for me is, investment in instruments of healing not hurting, compassion not cruelty; processes to manage not prevent immigration; broadening the definition of refugee; creating safe passage for people seeking sanctuary and refugees, not reducing them; supporting search and rescue of those in danger; care and speed in asylum decision-making and ending detention of already hurting people; establishing the right for asylum seekers to work; building cultures of welcome, hospitality and sanctuary.

It is possible to protect borders and provide reformed immigration and asylum policies that are based on justice, mercy and humility. Resettlement Schemes can be expanded and enhanced with quality inclusion of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. As a member of the United Nations, and a signatory of the UN Refugee Convention, the UK should share the responsibility for the protection of refugees globally.

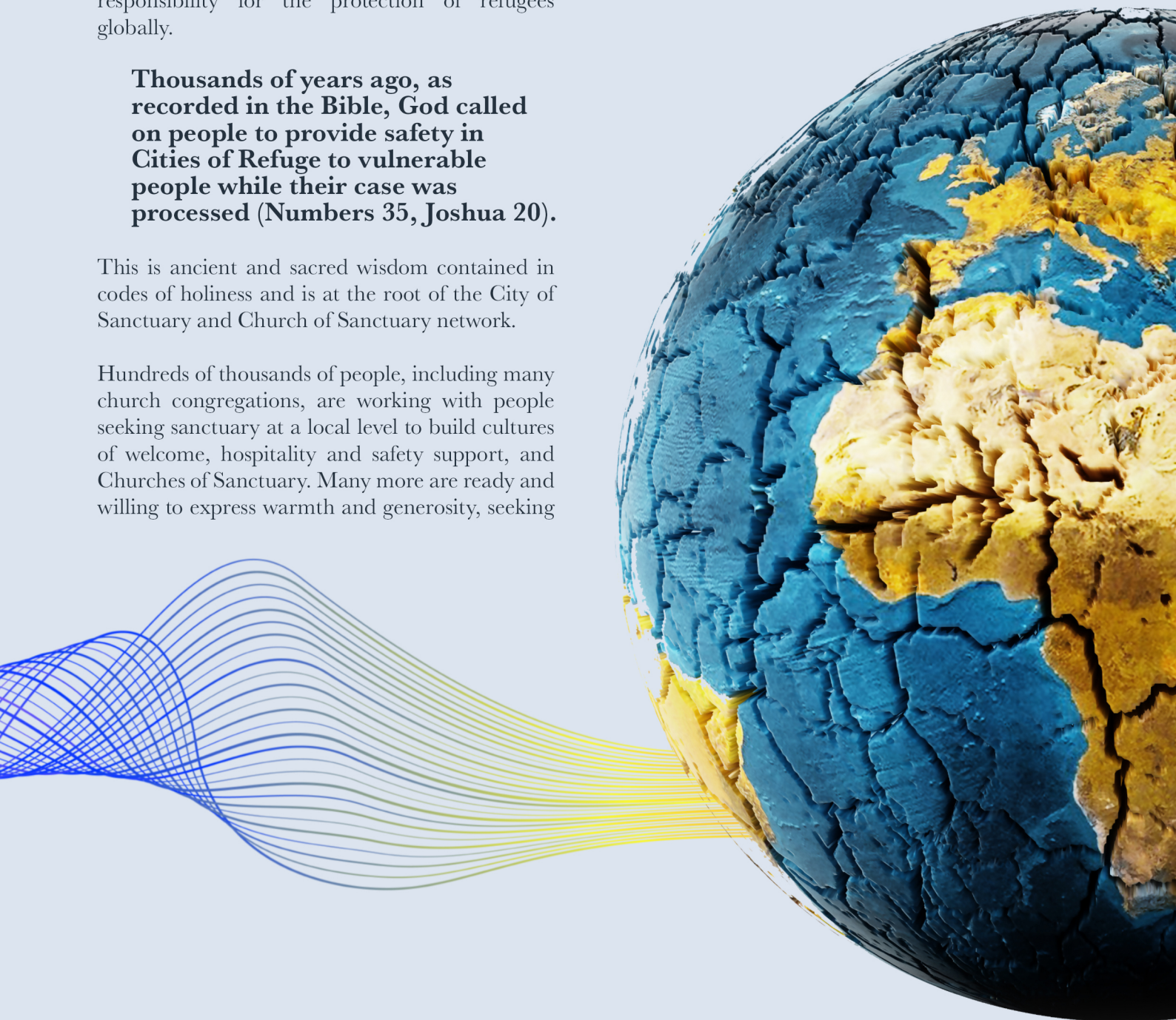
Thousands of years ago, as recorded in the Bible, God called on people to provide safety in Cities of Refuge to vulnerable people while their case was processed (Numbers 35, Joshua 20).

This is ancient and sacred wisdom contained in codes of holiness and is at the root of the City of Sanctuary and Church of Sanctuary network.

Hundreds of thousands of people, including many church congregations, are working with people seeking sanctuary at a local level to build cultures of welcome, hospitality and safety support, and Churches of Sanctuary. Many more are ready and willing to express warmth and generosity, seeking

justice. Becoming a Church/Meeting of Sanctuary is a way of engaging a whole congregation in the challenges addressed above (for more information see the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Church of Sanctuary website).

On 12 March 2023, the Brighton and Hove Methodist Circuit was recognised as the first Circuit of Sanctuary in the UK. The Circuit has been well supported in this journey by Sanctuary on Sea (Brighton and Hove City of Sanctuary). This is truly inspirational work, and a great model and inspiration for other Churches and faith centres to achieve Sanctuary Awards in the future. This work at the local level shows that the guiding principles of welcome, hospitality, safety and compassion are compelling, and bring people of different faiths, and those who profess no particular faith, to work together to support refugees and people seeking sanctuary.



Leeds is a diverse city and many of its churches seek to be place of welcome and refuge, support efforts in the community to meet the need of destitute asylum seekers, and speak out on justice issues.

The last Leeds City Council statistical report on migration was published in October 2022. It contains these statistics:

- 2,070 people arrived in Leeds from 70 different countries in 2021.
- This is 48% fewer people than 2020.
- 1,297 people were awaiting a decision on their asylum claim at the end of June 2022.

Recommended reading

Betts, A. and Collier, P. 2017. *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System*. Penguin. London.

Bhogal, Inderjit. 2021. *Hospitality and Sanctuary for All. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland*, London

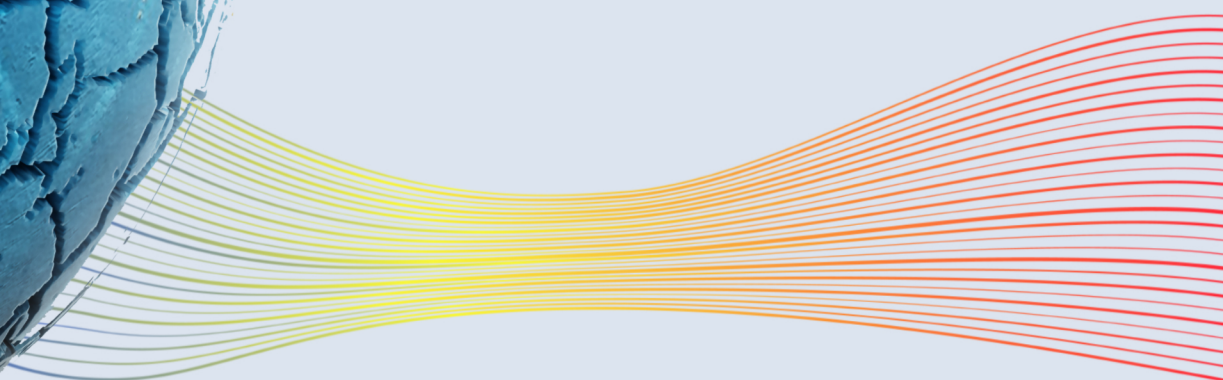
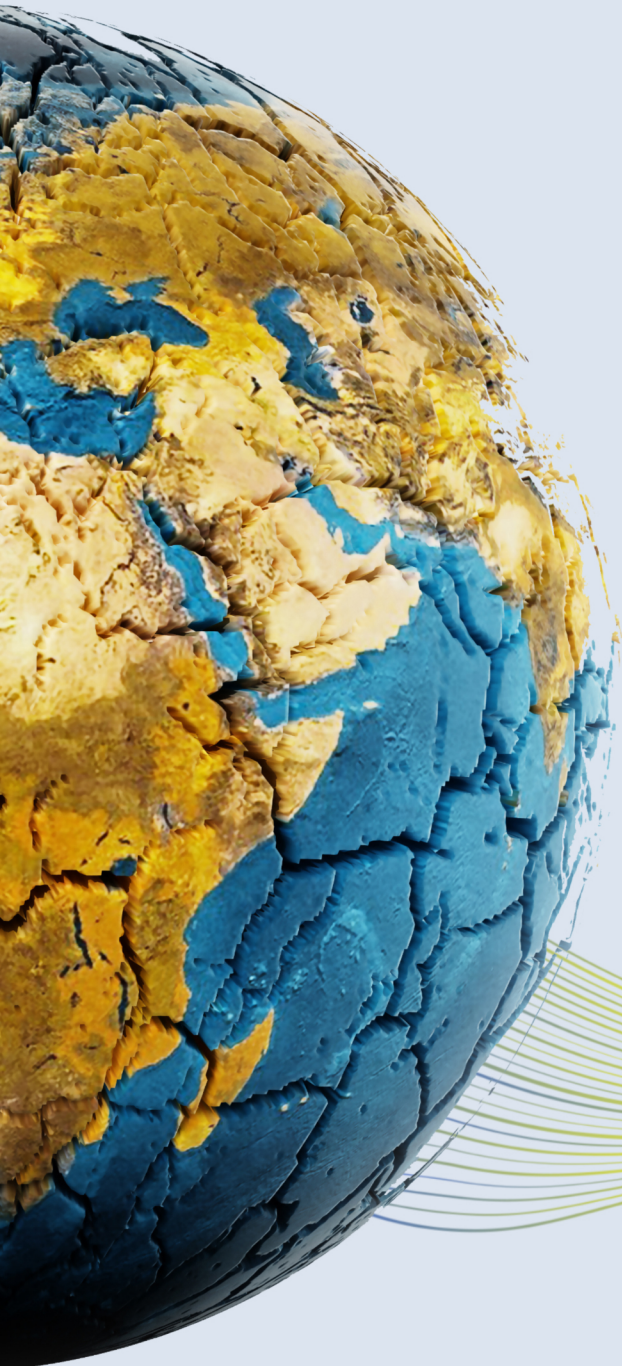
Caplan, Bryan. 2019. *Open Borders: The Science and Ethics of Immigration*. First Second, New York

Gaia, Vince 2022. *Nomad Century: How to Survive the Climate Upheaval*. Allen Lane, London

Khanna, Parag. 2021. *Move: How Mass Migration Will Reshape the World – and What it Means for You*. Weidenfield and Nicholson, New York

Mehta, Suketu. 2019. *This is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifest*. Jonathan Cape, London

Tulud, Gemma, C. 2014. *Toward a Theology of Immigration: Social Justice and Religious Experience*. Palgrave and Macmillan, New York



CAN THE RALLYING CRY FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE MAGNIFY HOPE FOR LONG TERM CHANGE?

Bronagh Daly, Faith and Creativity Lead at Leeds Church Institute, writes of her hope for change inspired by the Magnificat.



The Magnificat is a timeless lament for hope and a call to action. A joyful and prophetic rallying cry, filled with faith in God's love for the poor. It provides us with a glimpse of Mary's resolve in facing head-on the task bestowed upon her. The opportunity to bring salvation for all God's people at first seemed too huge for a young Jewish woman to contemplate. But by saying 'Yes', Mary agreed to create real change for generations to come.

Mary's words offer encouragement to anyone faced with a larger-than-life challenge: the confusion we experience when we know we have a call to ministry but feel the fear of the enormity of the challenge set out in front of us. Or the uncertainty we feel connected to a desire to put our faith into action on any number of social justice issues here in our city.

The burden of climate activism fell upon the young shoulders of Greta Thunberg who answered the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth with the same grace and willingness inspired by Mary.

In parallel to Mary's lament for change in the Magnificat, Greta is the embodiment of the magnification of the issue, **"We are at the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you do is talk fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you...?"**

As an activist for climate justice and a practising Catholic, I find myself longing for change. I doubt that my lowly offering to the movement will make an impact. I despair that the task of climate activism is too big. I am no Greta Thunberg. Her 'How Dare You' speech moved millions, including me, to tears. Her succinct protest won her icon status as a charismatic young woman speaking truth to power. How brave, how adventurous and how humble.

I have heard the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth. I know they are one and the same. But I am afraid the task is far too big for me, a lowly mother-of-two living in Leeds. How can I have the courage to say 'Yes' as emphatically as Mary did? Mary's humility and acceptance of a great opportunity for change is the reason her name is remembered as a symbol of change and activism today.

The determination of Mary is reflected in the women of Leeds who work tirelessly for climate justice, like All Hallows' parishioner Hannah Langdana, Manager of

the Leeds Development Education Centre. Her vision for long term care for creation is seen in the resources she writes for school age children to learn about Fair Trade and climate activism. Lessons of a simpler way of life are precious. Hannah helps to share them.

The resolve of Mary is alive in the young women of Leeds who speak truth to power. Women like Kate Hutchinson, the founder of *Yorkshire Sustainability Week*, a practising Catholic, who has recorded podcasts with eminent ecological commentators. Kate has also organised briefing events to hold local businesses accountable to the seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The bravery of Mary is evident in the stories we hear of young girls fleeing the trauma of war and natural disaster who arrive in Leeds. And also in the response heard in stories of hospitality, retold by our 'Schools of Sanctuary' worker Katherine Hogg, that celebrate the generosity of welcome that is provided by our local school communities.

The confidence of Mary shines through the teachings of Pope Francis who writes to all people of the planet to care for creation in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The Pope has given me the language to speak confidently about my care for creation in social settings. Inspired by this confidence, I continue to put my faith into action to answer the call for a rapid ecological conversion.

Seven years ago, I made a pledge to give up my car, buy fair trade, eat less meat, swap overseas holidays for camping adventures, buy secondhand clothes and talk to as many people as I could about the need to reduce plastic.

On the sidelines of my son's rugby match I chat with parents about the simple ways I reduce my carbon footprint. As I pack my groceries, I discuss the wasteful plastic packaging with the checkout assistant. I tell family members to adopt practices of less waste and learn from friends who are having a much lighter impact on the planet than I am.

Did these little blink-and-you-miss-them actions make any difference to the goals of an integral ecology where all peoples and planet thrive? Eco-theologian Carmody Gray warned that in a generation our planet may not be able to sustain us at the rate in which we are destroying it. Then the Pandemic happened. The grip of COVID-19 forced us as a planet to a standstill. Dangerous levels of CO₂ emissions rocketed downwards. Leeds city commuters reconnected with nature, hearing birdsong instead of traffic.

In lockdown we got to know our local woods and reconnected with the seasons and experienced the renewed kindness of neighbours.

Environmental commentators explained that the lockdowns provided us with an unplanned practice run at implementing a 'rapid ecological conversion'.

In lockdown we witnessed the horror of racism played out through police brutality as George Floyd cried out. "I can't breathe". As the planet gained a short reprieve from the choke hold of industrialisation, we saw our brother George take his last breath, reminding us that racism and climate destruction have the same oppressive master, capitalist greed.

Climate change and racism are two of the biggest social justice challenges of the 21st Century. To unravel their interconnectedness requires love, grace, and long-term commitment to systemic change. We know there is a felt disparity between those who cause oppression and those who are impacted by it.

Leeds based Tim Frenneux, Director of *Leeds Love it Share it*, warns us that chasing the 'Economic Growth' fairy tale will only end in disaster. Instead, he inspires us to adopt a regenerative or replenishing business model inspired by the waste free habits we see in nature, first nation peoples and Indigenous communities. Tim helps us to see that citizens panels here in Leeds will help us to speak up and to share our voice, and that young people standing with placards will signal to political leaders and those in power that change is needed.

I feel compelled to stand at the crossroads on the outskirts of the city of Leeds with my placard calling for a rapid ecological conversion, and to profess with a loud cry as Wisdom did in the book of Proverbs, 'Listen to me. I am Wisdom. Let knowledge mean more to you than silver and the finest gold. Wisdom is more than any precious jewels or whatever you desire.' The cry of climate and racial injustice can feel overwhelming for many of us. Inspired by the Magnificat we are encouraged to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the lowly, for it is here that Christ is born. When we say no to the sin of racism, Christ is born.

When we speak truth to the powerful who oppress others, Christ is born. And, when we hear the cry of the Earth, Christ is born.

Christ is present here in Leeds. He is born to be one with us all.

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR LAST, SAD GOODBYE? REFLECTING ON THE IMPACT OF LEAVING HOME AND SEEKING SANCTUARY IN A NEW COUNTRY



Katherine Hogg, Leeds Church Institute's Schools of Sanctuary Lead, shares part of our school resource created to promote understanding of those from Sanctuary-seeking families in Leeds.

Through my work with Leeds Church Institute, I support local schools to promote welcome for all, and educate pupils about issues facing those seeking asylum or refuge through the Schools of Sanctuary Award scheme. This year, Allerton Church of England Primary School and Leeds City Academy join Lawnswood School and John Smeaton Academy in receiving the award. Ten other schools have signed the pledge to be a 'School of Sanctuary', and are working towards fulfilling the eight criteria to receive the award.

'Windows of Opportunity' is a new resource we created for Key Stage 2 children attending church schools across Leeds, which supports discussion of the issues around sanctuary seeking. It draws inspiration from a short book by Janet Fraser Smith that bases reflection on refugee issues on scenes in the stained-glass windows at Christ Church in Armley. Here is a taste of one section of the resource which looks at saying goodbye, and reflects on the grief that children go through when leaving their home.

Do you remember the last meal you ate? Who did you eat it with?

Who is the last person you said goodbye to, and how long will it be before you see them again?

'Windows of Opportunity' asks these questions against the backdrop of The Last Supper, depicted in one of the windows at Armley Christ Church.



Jesus had spent many days with his disciples teaching them about the Kingdom of Heaven. They had all become close friends. Jesus knew he was going to suffer and die on a cross before he would see his friends again after he rose from the dead. It must have been happy and joyful for all the disciples to eat a meal together with Jesus, but also a painful and sad time for Jesus who knew what lay ahead (Luke 24: 13-35).

Throughout the stories in the 'Windows of Opportunity' resource, we are introduced to Samuel (not his real name) who is a child at a Leeds Primary School that has received their School of Sanctuary Award. Samuel lived in a village called Adi Quala in Eritrea. He was born there and lived with his family. His parents decided that Samuel, his brother and sister, should move to England to live with their older brother. They went by car to Ethiopia. With this story in mind, pupils are asked who they would say goodbye to if they had to leave their home in a hurry. What would they take with them and why?

To be creative in their reflection on the experience of Asylum Seekers and the Last Supper, pupils are encouraged to create their own stained-glass windows, showing the special people in their lives who they would say goodbye to, and with whom they would chose to share a last meal before saying goodbye.

In this way, Window of Opportunity draws parallels between our own experience, the experience of the disciples, and the experience of people seeking asylum in Leeds. By asking these questions, we can learn to walk alongside people seeking sanctuary and provide a true welcome inspired by our faith.

Please join all the schools around Leeds who are using these resources, and pray for refugees who have travelled so far to reach our city, struggle to settle in, learn English and make friends. A prayer used in schools is:

Loving God,

Thank you for our friends and family and the countries and places we love.

Thank you for the food we enjoy and those who look after us.

Thank you for the hellos and goodbyes at the beginning and end of the school day.

We pray for people who have to say sad goodbyes and don't know what will happen next.

Please give them peace in their hearts that you will take care of them and the people they love.

Amen

You can see the full version of Windows of Opportunity on the LCI website

<https://lcileeds.org/windows-of-opportunity-resource-schools-of-sanctuary-leeds/>

To find out more about Christ Church in Armley, a local place of refuge which is home to Meeting Point

<http://meetingpointleeds.org.uk/>

To order your copy of 'Refugee Realities in Church Art' by Janet Fraser Smith and photography by Alastair Morton send your request to: events@leedschurchinstitute.org

Hospitality and Sanctuary for All: The Hook Lecture 2023

How can we respond to the call of our faith to welcome refugees to Leeds and build a city of sanctuary for all?

The annual Hook Lecture returns this year as we welcome Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal to Leeds. Inderjit will tell the story of the City of Sanctuary project, building welcome, hospitality and safety since it was founded in 2005. As a movement it has embraced universities, schools, churches, theatres, libraries and maternity wards and has developed to face new challenges in the light of greater international displacement of people and the climate catastrophe.

This event is jointly organised by Leeds Church Institute, Leeds Minster, and Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds. All are welcome.

7pm, Tuesday 24 October 2023
Leeds Minster 2-6 Kirkgate Leeds LS2 7DJ



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