We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family

Laudato Si’ 52
Introducing VIVAT International

VIVAT International was founded in 2000 by the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) as an organization to lobby in favour of the poor, the marginalized and for the protection of creation at the United Nations. Since 2005, ten other congregations joined the original founders of VIVAT. Many are well known in Ireland and include the Spiritans (CSSp), the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), the Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA), the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary (MSHR), Comboni Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MCCJ), Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SCJ), and the Religious of the Assumption (RA).

With a very wide distribution of congregations, it can be said that VIVAT has its finger on the pulse of the issues of the poor and marginalized worldwide. It is also a powerful voice as it is geared to bring their agenda to an international audience through lobbying on concrete issues presented by member congregations at the UN. How does it do this? VIVAT’s first strength is indeed in having access to the people its members are working with and their issues. It has also put an infrastructure in place to ensure effective international lobbying. VIVAT opened and staffed a UN office in New York shortly after its foundation. In 2009 it opened another office in Geneva, Switzerland, home of the UN’s Human Rights Council and numerous international human rights groups. Other offices at regional level are being considered.

Since early 2011, representatives of the congregations of VIVAT in Ireland have been meeting to focus on issues which will be prepared for lobbying at the United Nations by VIVAT.
Introduction

Asylum Seekers! Migrants! Emigrants! Throughout this year we have been hearing so much about peoples on the move. For so long the people of Europe have been emigrating outwards in order to find places of opportunity so that they could establish new lives as farmers, business people, or even to express their faith freely. After a long time of struggling, of living in hardship and of working to integrate themselves into the host cultures, many people made it!

Now, in our time, the situation has become reversed! Now, thousands of people, from other cultures, religions, and languages, are attempting to get into Europe by fair means or foul, while fleeing from religious persecution, wars, natural disasters and so on, to the anguish of many in Europe. Where will we put them? How will we accommodate them? Who will look after them? They will need health, education and social welfare! They will need homes, schools and health care facilities! Will we be able to cope? Will they displace us? There is much concern, there is much anxiety!

Acknowledging that the issue of Migration has become such a dominant reality for many people nowadays, VIVAT Ireland has decided that it’s book of reflections this year will focus on the topic and do so from a Christian and holistic point of view. We herewith offer four reflections about Migration which can be used individually or in a group setting.

In our first reflection, we consider the ways in which environmental degradation affects the lives of the Bofo family in Ethiopia and forces some members of the family to migrate.
Our second reflection speaks of the importance of welcoming the one who arrives as an Asylum seeker. **Martha Obeka**, Uganda, helps us to open our eyes to her reality and to her need. It is hard for us to imagine people being oppressed in the ways that she was. It would be difficult to say “no admittance” to people in her situation! Our third reflection tells us about **Lili Pujiati** of Indonesia and about the brutal reality that is “Human Trafficking”, another gross abuse of human rights in our time, which has become very prevalent in our consciousness. Can we turn a blind eye to people caught up in this predicament?

In our fourth reflection we pray that there be peace on earth and we acknowledge such peace must begin with each one of us. **Sr Ann Kelly MSHR** illustrates this in her powerful story. In keeping with the recent Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* we affirm the interdependence that does or should exist between humanity and all creatures of the earth and indeed with the earth itself. Disharmony between people, nature and the earth creates upheavals which, in turn, leads to the other problems upon which we have been reflecting.

May our hearts and our minds be opened to the needs of peoples in our world today and to our capacity to overcome those problems which make it necessary for people to run away from their homes and from their lands in the first place.
Migration
resulting from environmental degradation

Week 1
Leader: A clear link is emerging between long-term human migration and climate change. Research is now pointing to heat stress as a consistent reason why growing numbers of men, in particular, leave home, driven by the negative effect of higher temperatures on farm and non-farm income. As the world continues to warm, this trend is certain to grow, leading to what Pope Francis\textsuperscript{1} refers to as a ‘tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation.’ (LS. 25)

Ritual (Part 1)
Three participants place a bowl of topsoil, a bowl of water and a lighted candle on a table, side-by-side.

The fragile layer of topsoil on which human life — and the livelihoods of farm families — depend, is resilient and regenerates its structure to enable water percolation and storage, and support plant and biological life. However, prolonged dry spells and increasing levels of heat can change this rich, life-giving resource into infertile dust.

OPENING PRAYER
(LS. 85)

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

\textsuperscript{1} All references to Pope Francis are taken from the Encyclical Letter, \textit{Laudato Si} (2015).
Amen

**Leader:** God’s Word includes many stories of God’s people as migrants — in this case due to famine.

**Reader:** So Joseph went and told Pharaoh, ‘My father and brothers have arrived from Canaan with their flocks and cattle and all their possessions. Here they are, in the region of Goshen’. He had taken five of his brothers, and he now presented them to Pharaoh. Pharaoh asked his brothers, ‘What is your occupation?’ And they gave Pharaoh the answer, ‘Your servants are shepherds like our fathers before us’. They went on to tell Pharaoh, ‘We have come to stay in this country for the time being, since there is no pasturage for your servants’ flocks, Canaan being stricken with the famine. So now please allow your servants to settle in the region of Goshen’. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘They may stay in the region of Goshen, and if you know of any capable men among them, put them in charge of my own livestock’. Thus Israel settled in Egypt, in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there; they were fruitful and grew very numerous.

Genesis 47:1-6b, 27

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**TAIZÉ CHANT**

Ubi caritas et amor,
ubis caritas Deus ibi est.

*(Taizé - Ubi Caritas - YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=R448WVra9ww)*
Leader: The great commandment challenges any tendency to hide behind the ‘globalisation of indifference’.

Reader: The Pharisees got together and, to put Jesus to the test, one of them put a further question, ‘Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too’.

Matthew 22:34b-40

STRUGGLES OF POOR FARM FAMILIES IN ETHIOPIA’S RIFT VALLEY

Mr Bofo and his wife Shewaye live in the small Ethiopian village of Meja Lalu, 130 kms south east of Addis Ababa in the Central Rift Valley. They have eight children and four grandchildren. Like almost everyone in the village, they are farmers and utterly dependent on the food they can produce.

In Meja Lalu, as in the whole of Central Rift Valley, small farmers like Mr Bofo depend on the timing and quantity of rainfall. As the impacts of climate change increase, however, rainfall and other climate patterns in the Rift Valley are becoming more unpredictable, exposing farming households to periods of drought and flooding that undermine income and family wellbeing. They don’t have the resources to get through months and years of drought, so individuals and households cope with these disasters by migrating to cities and bigger towns.
Parents like Mr and Mrs Bofo are the main source of farmland for children, but their farm (less than one hectare) is already too small to feed and cover the medical expenses of their family. Desperation for land and viable livelihood opportunities, coupled with recurring periods of drought, crop losses, and the absence of alternative income sources, has already forced four of their children to migrate to bigger towns in search of unskilled, off-farm employment.

Their daughter Misha, who worked as a housekeeper in another town, is now back home and extremely ill, having contracted the HIV/AIDS virus. The three children who are working try to send money home, but their social exposure in difficult work places is not without a price.

Global warming, much of it due to human activity, is a root cause of the dire poverty affecting the Bofos and their neighbours in rural Meja Lalu. Their story is the story of most families in the village.

Until people in the world’s better-off nations open their eyes to what is happening in Africa’s many ‘Meja Lalus’, little will change for families like the Bofos who, in the words of Pope Francis, “have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change...” (LS. 25)

Leader: Please take a few moments to select from among the following quotes the one that resonates most with you. Then quietly ponder this quote for a few moments. At the bell, turn to your neighbour in twos or threes and listen to each other as you share your reflections.

- Who is my neighbour? What can it mean to love my neighbour as myself amid the opportunities and challenges of these early years of the 21st Century?
- ‘Solidarity is not a vague feeling of compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the
contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good: that is to say the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.’

Pope John Paul II (1987)

‘The world’s wealthiest countries have been emitting more than their fair share of greenhouse gases. Resultant floods, droughts and other climate change impacts continue to fall disproportionately on the world’s poorest people and countries, many of which are in Africa.’

Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2005)

‘We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference.’ (LS. 52)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION
(Adapted from Laudato Si. 85)

Bring healing to our lives that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer
Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor of the earth, who never count the cost to the earth of their business activities or lifestyles.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

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**OUR FATHER...**

**Ritual (Part 2)**

- A participant adds home-baked bread (with a few slices already cut) to the 3 elements already on the table.

- A second participant places a ‘Commitment to Action’ poster where all can see it. On it will be written an example* of a possible first commitment to action.

- Take a quiet moment to contemplate the interconnectedness of all things.
CONCLUDING PRAYER
(LS. 85)

Praise be to you!
Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.

Amen

*Example:
I will join an organisation working to defend the environment by, for example, restoring, beautifying or cleaning-up a landscape that belongs to everyone... as a way to break free of indifference and careless consumerist attitudes.
A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war or violence. By law, a refugee must be given protection.

An asylum seeker is someone seeking protection, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been assessed.

You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10:19
Leader: World religions ask for hospitality to strangers and prohibit mistreating or oppressing them. Kindness to the stranger is considered a virtuous act. From its beginnings the Hebrew story is the story of a people in exile, of aliens resident in foreign lands suffering oppression and persecution.

The Christian story also speaks of solidarity with the homeless. Mary and Joseph were forced to seek refuge and fled to Egypt as Herod sought to kill the baby Jesus. Jesus journeyed as a stranger into many places, spending time and sharing meals with the most marginalised and oppressed people in society. He called on people to love their enemies, give generously to the poor, and offer hospitality to strangers. He taught that the way we respond to strangers and to the poor would identify us as people of faith.
**SONG**

*Introduction:* As people of faith we are to welcome and comfort all who come to us as strangers, seeking refuge. We are to welcome the Asylum Seeker.

*Whatsoever You Do to the Least of my People,*
*That You Do unto Me*

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZJxU1oPgeg

When I was hungry, you gave me to eat;
When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink.
Now enter into the home of my Father.

*Refrain:*
*Whatsoever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me.*

When I was homeless, you opened your door;
When I was naked, you gave me your coat.
Now enter into the home of my Father.

*Refrain:

When I was weary, you helped me find rest;
When I was anxious, you calmed all my fears.
Now enter into the home of my Father.

*Refrain:

When in a prison, you came to my cell;
When on a sickbed, you cared for my needs.
Now enter into the home of my Father.

*Refrain:

When I was laughed at, you stood by my side;
When I was happy, you shared in my joy.
Now enter into the home of my Father.

*Refrain:  

*Week 2*
JESUS’ COMMANDMENT OF LOVE

Jesus says

‘I am hungry and you give me food, I am thirsty and you give me drink, I am a stranger and you welcome me, I am naked and you clothe me, I am sick and you visit me, I am in prison and you come to me. Truly, I say to you, as you do it to one of the least of my people, you do it to me.’

(Based on Matthew 25:35,40)

MARTHA OBEKA
The Story of an Asylum Seeker in Ireland

My name is Martha Obeka. I am thirty-eight years of age and I come from Tororo District in Uganda. When I was twelve years of age my father sent me to school in Busia District to the south of my home. I stayed there for only a year as I was very sick for a long time and had to leave school. When I got better I was too old to go to school and my father sent me to learn about hair dressing. He had a business in Kampala and bought me a hair salon which I managed very well and did good business.

I fell in love with a manager of my father’s business and we had three children. They are Barnet, aged 17 years, Tracy aged 15 years and Trevor aged 12 years. We lived together as a happy family in Kampala. All this changed on the night of the 9th December 2011 when the notorious “Wembley” (called officially the Violent Crime Crack Unit) abducted my father and the father of my children just as they were
Week 2

closing the shop and making for home. The shop was ransacked in search for a gun, but none was found. They were blindfolded and taken to a forest area along Entebbe Road. My father was taken aside and while he was being beaten mercilessly the father of my children managed to escape into the darkness. After two days he made his way home and told us the awful news. We went to the forest area but found nothing, only blood.

Why all this? My father was a supporter of the opposition party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) led by Kizza Besigya. Just a month after my father’s disappearance a “police” gang broke into our home. The three children, their father and I were just eating our evening meal. They came searching for a gun. We were tied up and the children put in another room. I was put lying head down with heavy boots holding me to the floor while the father of my children was being beaten. They then took him away to go to the store and to search there for the gun. I never saw him again. My horrible fear is that he is dead.

I too was an FDC supporter and my hair salon business with its large compound was often used for FDC meetings. In April they came for me. I was taken from my salon to a secret place where I was beaten and raped. After that I was brought to a police station and charged with some trumped up charge. I was summarily brought to court and then remanded to Luzira Prison. My family did not know where I was as I did not have contact with anyone outside the prison. I was among all these prisoners and did not know what to do. The daily routine included eight hours of digging trenches and of breaking stones. After six months of this I became very sick and was admitted to the general hospital. As I was slowly recovering a visitor to the hospital, a good business associate of mine who travelled a lot to Kenya, happened to notice me. I asked her to help. She said she would return the next day.

It was the 18th October when I walked through the doors of the hospital wearing a wig and clothes that my friend had brought and with which
she dressed me in the bathroom. “Do not look at anyone”, she said, “But go straight to the door and outside to the car park where there is someone waiting in a car for you”. This is my wonderful friend who drove with me that night straight to the Kenya border and to freedom. Five days later I made my way to Dublin Airport via Abu Dhabi and was able to enter the country under the alias of a young wife to an elderly Muslim Arab who travelled with me. He put me in a taxi and directed the driver to bring me to ORAC (Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner). I have travelled much to escape death and remain alive for my children. There is a scar in my heart as there are wounds on my body. I do not feel that I am a full person as I am without my children. Sometimes I can speak with them over the phone and they are always crying. My mother is looking after them, but they miss me, as I miss them so very much. In May 2015 I was granted refugee status in Ireland and I can’t wait to be re-united with my children.

Martha is a client of SPIRASI, the *Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative* at 213 NCR, Dublin 7. This centre was established by the Spiritans in 1999 to work for the benefit and welfare of refugees and asylum seekers, especially in Ireland. In partnership with others, SPIRASI enables access to specialist services to promote the well-being of the human person, and encourages self-reliance and integration into Ireland.

A Moment of Reflection and Sharing

*How does Martha’s story speak to you?*
PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Are our attitudes too narrow, our assumptions too simplistic, our behaviour too predictable? May the strong take care of those who are weak, may minorities irrespective of race, class, or gender, be included in the one circle of life.

All: Make us One, O Lord, in the family of your love.

Are our boundaries too limited, our preferences too conditioned, our habits too fixed? May the weaker links in the chain of life, the refugee and asylum seeker, be respected and justly treated.

All: Make us One, O Lord, in the family of your love.

Is our god too small; our understanding of life too exclusive? May people of various religions and cultures, whose names for God are different from our own, find inclusion in our world.

All: Make us One, O Lord, in the family of your love.

God of all cultures, God of all people, help us to avoid labelling anyone as inferior or second-class. May we welcome the stranger into our midst.

All: Make us One, O Lord, in the family of your love.
Each person is made in the image and likeness of God. Help us to see in the stranger an invitation to welcome God into our midst. May we have a desire to work for a world united against injustice and for peace, now and always.

All: Make us One, O Lord, in the family of your love.

OUR FATHER

CONCLUDING PRAYER

God of Mercy and Compassion, You have made all things and hold all things in being.

Through this time of reflection and prayer we pray You to empower us to commit to a better world for all. Help us build a human community where the inequalities that separate rich from poor, strong from weak, are overcome and all can know justice and live in peace. Amen.

ACTION

Find out more about the reality of Asylum Seekers in your country.

What can you do to welcome the Stranger in your midst?
We are our sisters’ and brothers’ keeper.

Human Trafficking

Place a map of the world on the floor creatively.
Leader: This week we are focusing on the suffering of those who are victims of so many kinds of human trafficking. We fail to see that we are our brothers’ and our sisters’ keeper.

All: Lord we ask you to change our hearts that we can see our sister and brother in everybody.

Hymn: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LIRKemOAVY

Refrain: The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Blessed be the Lord.

I will bless the Lord at all times, with praise ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the Lord, who will hear the cry of the poor. (R)

Let the lowly hear and be glad: the Lord listens to their pleas; and to hearts broken, God is near, who will hear the cry of the poor. (R)

Ev’ry spirit crushed, God will save; will be ransom for their lives; will be safe shelter for their fears, and will hear the cry of the poor. (R)
We proclaim your greatness, O God, 
your praise ever in our mouth; 
ev’ry face brightened in your light, 
for you hear the cry of the poor.(R)

Paraphrase of Psalm 34
Composer: John Foley (1978)

Antiphon: Leviticus 23:22 Good News Translation (GNT)
When you harvest your fields, do not cut the grain at the edges of the fields, and do not go back to cut the heads of grain that were left; leave them for poor people and foreigners. The LORD is your God.

Psalm 40 v.1-4,11,13,16,17
Good News Translation (GNT)
I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. he lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord; may your love and faithfulness always protect me. Be pleased to save me, Lord; Come quickly, Lord, to help me.
But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
“The Lord is great!”

But as for me, I am poor and needy;
may the Lord think of me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
you are my God, do not delay.

Antiphon:
When you harvest your fields, do not cut the grain at the edges of the fields, and do not go back to cut the heads of grain that were left; leave them for poor people and foreigners. The LORD is your God.

**MY LIFE I SHARE WITH YOU**

I am Lili Pujiati from Indonesia. I was interested in working abroad because I was tempted by the promise of sponsors/agents working in Taiwan as carers with a salary of 6 million rupiahs (500 Euro) each month. It turned out to be a false promise. Instead I was sold from one agency to another, even to a prostitution agency. I prayed so much in my distress and I believe that the Lord heard my prayer because I managed to escape and run away from that place which unfortunately caused me to go to jail for 10 months without a trial. I did not even know what I had done wrong.

After returning to my homeland, which was a great relief, I and other migrant workers founded The Federation of Indonesian Migrant Labour
Organization (FOBMI) in 2003. This FOBMI became the forerunner of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI) which I initiated together with my friends – ex-migrant workers – in 2004.

Then occurred a massive deportation of migrant workers from Malaysia to Nunukan (Indonesia), together with the organizations concerned with migrant workers. I did a lot of advocacy work on this deportation until the government issued a regulation which helped the migrant workers from Malaysia to come to Indonesia in a much more humane way and to find work without getting into the wrong hands.

As well as that, I founded the Shelter Home for migrant workers. Shelter was used as a temporary shelter for migrant workers who just got out of the hospital and still require outpatient treatment in a hospital in Jakarta and for trafficked victims. I opened a culinary business called Warung Gang Buntu to fund the running costs of the shelter and the work of advocacy for migrant workers and trafficked victims.

You can visit: Twitter: @buruhmigran1 peduliburuhmigran.blogspot.com

Shared by: Lili Pujiati
Translated by: Ruth, SSpS
ONE BODY WITH MANY PARTS

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink. For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. If the foot were to say, “Because I am not a hand, I don’t belong to the body,” that would not keep it from being a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, “Because I am not an eye, I don’t belong to the body,” that would not keep it from being a part of the body. If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. There would not be a body if it were all only one part! As it is, there are many parts but one body. Now you together are Christ's body, but each of you is a different part of it.

Pause

INTERCESSIONS

(Each person reading an intercession first reads, then takes a candle, lights it, and places it onto the world map while the response is prayed by all. Leave a moment of silence between each intercession).

Shamefully in our time human trafficking is the fastest growing form of international crime and is now the second largest illegal trade in the world.

Lord, change the hearts of governments to relieve the suffering of people being trafficked.
Following the tragedy at Lampedusa, in the Mediterranean Sea Pope Francis spoke of men, women and children escaping persecution, torture, exploitation, starvation and war, who, like us, are seeking a better life.

*Lord, change the hearts of governments to relieve the suffering of people who are forced to flee their homes.*

For all the people who are engaged in the illegal buying and selling of organs and the victims whose lives are put in danger.

*Lord, change the hearts of governments to relieve the suffering of those involved in illegal or legal organ sales.*

We are aware of the abuse of children as child soldiers and for other military use thus depriving them of their families and childhood.

*Lord, change the hearts of governments to relieve the suffering of children who are unable to have a normal childhood.*

Researchers expose cases of forced marriage where people are put under pressure to marry against their will due to cultural expectations and family pressures.

*Lord, change the hearts of governments to relieve the suffering of women and men who are forced to marry against their will.*

**OUR FATHER**

*Let us pray*

Lord, you were baptised with the spirit of gladness and joy but still had to pass through the fire of suffering. Help us with St Paul to pray that our world and its people will have a permanent place in our hearts especially those suffering terrible crimes at the hands of
ruthless people. Anoint us Lord that we may burn with compassion and not be frightened to do all we can to open this world to God’s mercy. Amen


http://www.antislavery.org/english/what_we_do/education/resources_for_education/

http://humaneeducation.org/blog/category/resources/

http://www.aptireland.org/

Videos:
- www.mtvexit.org
- www.ruham.ie
- www.humantrafficking.wordpress.com

Faith based resources:
- To be silent is to be unfaithful (Church of Scotland)
- http://www.unanima-international.org (stations of the cross based on the story of a woman who is trafficked, prayers for Lent and Advent)
- www.aptireland.org (toolkit)

For schools:
- www.antislavery.org has lesson plans and other school resources
- www.humaneeducation.org has a list of available resources for schools including films, books and creative lesson ideas
LET THERE BE

Peace on Earth

LET IT BEGIN WITH ME

Week 4
Leader: We gather in this place to pray for our Earth Community. As we recognise our ONE humanity and our interconnectedness with all living species may we take time to reflect on how warfare, the degradation of our earth and forced human mobility in its many forms is shaping our planet, our nations and our cultures. Let us pray for wisdom and insight to respond with compassion and courage to the challenges and opportunities that these realities are calling us to at this time in our history.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Creator, we are ONE humanity, invited through the gift of life to live in harmony with each other, with all species and with our planet Earth. May we honour this invitation by the way we live and interact with each other and with all of Creation. We ask this through Christ Our Lord, Amen

HYMN: PRAYER OF ST FRANCIS

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aq-QM_Fh6o

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,
And where there’s doubt, true faith in You.

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there’s despair in life, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness – only light,
And where there’s sadness ever joy.
O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved, as to love, with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving of ourselves that we receive
And in dying we are born to eternal life.

A PSALM
(Jan Phillips: ‘NO ORDINARY TIME’ Page 116)

As the deer that yearns for running streams
so do I yearn for a peaceful world
My tears flow like blood as forests burn
my heart breaks open as bombs explode.

It is said “we are gods”
and the “light of the world”
yet we kill and spread darkness
with Your name on our lips.
Did you not say “judge not
and be merciful?”
I cover my face in shame
at the hatred in our midst.

For thousands of years
we have called out Your name
singing Adonai, Allah, Redeemer, God
while Your words say
the kingdom is spread out before us
and our kindness to others is kindness to You.
We cry for your help though your hands are ours we call for your mercy though we are its agents.

Lo! Do I mourn for our ignorance and greed I wail through the night as bombs light the sky yet love songs of birds rouse me at dawn the heat of your sun awakens me.

O Mystery of Mystery, though your ways bewilder me though I wander through my days crying “what shall I do?” Your voice drifts in on the morning breeze: ‘Be who you are. The doing will get done. Love what you see. I am that, I am.’

**Scripture Reading**

Isaiah 43:19-21

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.
“BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE FOR THEIR COUNTRY, TRIBE AND ABOVE ALL THEIR CHILDREN”

Sr Ann Kelly MSHR

The day dawned like any other (day) in the city of Voinjama, Lofa County, Liberia. However, before long the phone rang from other parts of the country alerting us to trouble. A young Lorma girl had been killed allegedly by a Mandingo boy in a nearby town. The event ushered in tragic memories of the recent civil war. The targeted tribe were the Mandingos, who by and large, were Muslims. They were targeted by Charles Taylor the President of that time. He reached into the fears of the people and set tribe against tribe; religion against religion; neighbour against neighbour. He created stories that had no foundation and left behind a wake of death, destruction, abuse and betrayal. Now the war was over but the alleged killing tapped the raw and bleeding psyches of the people - just fresh from refuge in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Ghana.

The town of Voinjama was quite a distance from where the alleged killing took place. The news spread rapidly and before long we saw the Catholic Church in Voinjama billowing smoke and flames in every direction; we saw newly roofed mosques ripped asunder. Young fighters without work, rallied to the call of ‘war’ once again. Women and children of every tribe and religion rushed in every direction. Hundreds took refuge with us, the Holy Rosary Sisters. The day wore on in tension and fear. Looting was the order of the day.

Eventually the UN peacekeepers managed to bring a measure of security and control into the chaotic situation. A curfew was imposed.

Normality gradually returned after about a week. Tribal elders from all round the country were called to gather in the city hall. Religious leaders were also invited. The local people of the town particularly from the Mandingo and Lorma tribes were assembled. The ritual of understanding and acknowledgement of wrong had started. The gathering continued to listen to the tragedies of the victims of the violence. Tears were shed. Responsibility owned.
Finally, the Mandingo tribe admitted the responsibility for the riots; they acknowledged that their youth refused to wait for an investigation into the true story and they admitted targeting the churches because they judged them places visited by the Lorma people. The Lorma people in their turn acknowledged their retaliatory actions.

The Mandingo tribe went to ‘hang head’ and come to ‘one word’ re-acceptance of their guilt since they were found guilty of initiating the riots. Hours dragged by. Eventually their representatives returned. Silence rang out in the hall – no word was spoken – they simply prostrated before the Lormas – a nonverbal traditional way of seeking forgiveness in the context.

Now the Lormas left the hall and went to ‘hang head’ and decide whether or not to accept or reject their acknowledgment of guilt and to move along the path of reconciliation. They argued bitterly. They were tired of the endless attempts to put their differences and betrayals behind them. Gradually, however, they too came to a sense of their own part during the war. They began to acknowledge again how often they were manipulated by ‘power brokers’ during the war and how in the end all peace loving people of every tribe and religion ended up seeking refuge in foreign lands. They returned quietly to the hall and reached down to touch their brothers and sisters who were still prostrated and embraced them as a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation.

All pledged to begin again and never to return to the old order of war and destruction but to seek instead understanding and proper information and follow the way of peace in order to build a better future for their country, tribe and above all their children. From that day on we have known only peace in Lofa County and particularly in Voinjama City.
Our theme this week is:

*Let there be peace on earth –
let it begin with me*

*How does this story challenge me? us?*

Pause for Reflection – Sharing

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

O Loving Christ, you gave us the example that one can have no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friend:

*Teach us to love our neighbour as ourselves*

May political, religious and community leaders come together to address the pain and suffering in war-torn areas of our world and may we learn that peace cannot be achieved through acts of violence:

*Teach us to love our neighbour as ourselves*

May we be willing to make choices that will lessen the threat of spiritual, political and economic unrest for others. May those who are going through warfare and conflict at this time be given the wisdom and strength they need to work for justice:

*Teach us to love our neighbour as ourselves*

May we learn to respect our Earth’s resources so that future generations and species can survive:

*Teach us to love our neighbour as ourselves*

May our desire for peace not just be words. May we use our gifts to build peace in our homes, families and communities:

*Teach us to love our neighbour as ourselves*
Spontaneous Prayer

FINAL PRAYER

Loving God, Source of all Being, Your Breath of Life renews our Earth each day. As we honour Your Presence in all things - may we long for peace, work for peace and be builders of peace in our world. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.

FINAL HYMN

Touch the Earth (Kathy Sherman, CSJ)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ8JZDgmNBc

Touch the earth with gentleness,
touch the earth with love,
touch her with a future
by the way you live today.
God has given us the power
to create the world anew,
if we touch the earth together,
me and you.
The time is here, the time is now.
We can change things.
Give the earth your dream for harmony;
she is waiting for you,
waiting for me.

Show the earth you care
about her future,
melt the walls of hate and fear
that keep us apart.
Believe we can live together
as friends of the earth.

So be the reason,
be the hope for others
to believe that the earth
is meant for beauty,
goodness and peace,
and that our God of love is
God of the Earth’s one family.

Action:
Consciously express a word or action for peace
in your family, community, neighbourhood
this week.

Youtube: http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/
pages/Read-the-Charter.html
http://charterforcompassion.org/
This book of reflections and prayers was prepared by:

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