

Presentation to Laudato Si Group 8th December 2021
Parish of Our Lady of the Valley

Firstly, for anyone who was unaware that our Parish was one of a number of local Parishes which accommodated the Camino to COP Walkers, I will do a quick recap.

What was the Camino and how did it come about?

The Camino was initially muted by the Faith Bridge of Extinction Rebellion (XR). In September 2021, 50 Christians set off to walk the 500 miles to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) in Glasgow.

The aim of the Walkers was to highlight the urgent need for Climate Justice and to inspire others to demand that our World Leaders treat Climate Change as an emergency. Along their 500-mile route the walkers stayed overnight in both Clitheroe and Newton from 3rd to 5th October 2021. Whilst the Walkers were here, they needed to be housed and fed and they wanted an opportunity to meet as many people as possible to share their concerns about Climate Justice and to highlight what we as ordinary citizens can do to limit climate change.

An integral part of this community engagement was the Coat of Hopes, which is a patchwork garment made of embroidered pieces of blanket. The Coat (which even has its own song), was worn by a series of "coat pilgrims", who sewed patches on to the Coat to reference the hopes and feelings of the communities which helped to create this amazing garment. The Coat seeks to build connections between people and communities, and to value and carry their voices. If you would like to learn more about the Coat of Hopes, then look online and visit <https://caminotocop.com>

My experience of the Camino to COP

The Walkers or Caministas (as they preferred to be known) needed feeding, laundry services and accommodation for 3 nights as well as opportunities to speak to as many people as would listen and as such had scheduled a rest day for Monday 4th October, which would give them to opportunity to rest and to engage with local people.

Anyone who was interested in helping was asked to attend a series of meetings to decide which Parishes would undertake what duties. I attended along with Mark and Anthony on behalf of our Parish, and it was decided that we would help with the packed lunches, the preparation of a sit-down lunch in Clitheroe as well as providing food for the Walkers when they arrived at Newton. In addition to ourselves and representatives from the Faith Bridge of XR, people from St. Mary's, St James, the URC, Trinity Methodists, Quakers and Buddhists attended and pledged their support. I was absolutely privileged to work with so many people from different denominations and faiths who were all enthusiastic about contributing towards such an endeavour.

As a group we were able to organise publicity and permission to hold two cultural events as well as arranging a session of Oi Gong with Bill Wilkinson and offering all the practical assistance which the Camino would require. The Quakers made their Meeting House available for any who simply wanted a quiet space to pray and have some quiet time. There were numerous press and radio appearances arranged to enable the Caministas to spread their message of faith and hope to a wider audience. To this end, Mark arranged for a group of CRGS students to come and have a Q & A session with the Walkers. Members of the Public were invited in for refreshments and to ask questions about the reasons for the Camino. St. Mary's C of E Church accommodated most of the walkers in their Church Hall overnight. All the different groups had asked for and received help from their congregations to ensure that there were sufficient refreshments for the scheduled events. XR Members came from the Wirral, Lancaster, and Warrington to help lead a procession from St. Mary's Hall to the Market where there were poetry readings and live music performed by Orange Zebra. On the evening of 4th October, the URC hosted a social event for the Walkers and the public where entertainment was provided by the RV Jazz & Blues Club.

The following day the Walkers were given breakfast and a packed lunch before setting off for Newton Community Hall where they were to spend the night. The weather was dreadful and as you may imagine they were very grateful to receive the hot soup which Mark and Pauline had prepared and which I had taken over along with bread, quiches and other foods which had been prepared for their evening meal. After that any people who had joined the Camino for the day were transported back to Clitheroe in our Electric car.

All in all, there was an amazing coming together of all the local Churches and faith groups around Clitheroe and Newton. There was a huge outpouring of kindness and generosity from our Parishioners who baked, shopped, prepared food, listened, talked, and generally just said "what can I do?" As there were so many food donations, we were able to distribute carloads of food to two Food Banks, The Salvation Army, a Veterans Group, the Beavers, and the Cookery Club attached to the Clitheroe Food Bank.

Was it worth it or in other words what did the COP 26 Climate Pact actually achieve?

Negotiators from nearly 200 countries unanimously signed the Glasgow Climate Pact. In it, they agreed to increase their efforts to cut emissions. The wealthier countries agreed to double their funding to protect those poorer countries who have contributed the least to climate change and yet still suffer the deadliest consequences of it.

On a positive note, Fossil fuels were mentioned for the first time in the history of COPs. Unfortunately, the language was watered down by India and the US **and went from “phasing out coal and fossil fuel subsidies” to “phasing down unabated coal power and phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies”**.

The Pact did accept the need for wealthier countries to fund climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries but it failed to secure a loss and damage fund, which had previously been identified as a condition for success. In any event developing countries are still waiting to see any of the \$100 billion per year which was promised to them under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

On a positive note, the Pact did agree about the importance of combating climate change and agreed that the richer countries are not doing enough to prevent a global catastrophe. It called upon the participants to strengthen their pledges to reduce emissions by the end of 2022, three years earlier than previously set out in the Paris Agreement.

Promises and pledges

The Pact is unclear about how much and how quickly each country should cut its emissions. Nor did it give a clear plan to limit warming to 1.5 degrees, or even 2 degrees C above preindustrial levels.

Crucially as we already know even if Global warming is not limited to 1.5 degrees C Island communities such as those in the Marshall Islands will literally disappear beneath the sea. The bad news for such communities is that even if the participants adhere to the pledges, they made at COP26, global warming would still only be limited to 2.4 degrees C.

Deforestation

More than 140 countries including the U.S.A, Brazil, Russia, and China, and the other countries which make up 90% of the world's forest cover have agreed to phase out deforestation by 2030. However a similar promise was made in the 2015 Paris Agreement since which date, tropical primary forest loss has increased rather than decreased.

Reducing Coal & Methane emissions

Over 40 countries agreed to phase out coal production which is the world's largest source of carbon dioxide emissions, by 2030. However, the world's largest coal users such as the USA, China, India, and Australia did not agree to limit their coal usage.

More than 100 countries have signed up to the Global Methane Pledge, which aims to cut methane emissions by 30% by 2030, compared to 2020 levels. Regrettably the key methane producers such as China, Russia, and India did not sign the pledge.

Phasing out petrol cars

At least six major car manufacturers and 30 countries agreed to phase out petrol and diesel-powered vehicles by 2040. Alas the USA, China, and Japan did not sign up to this. Such vehicles account for approximately 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

US-China agreement

The world's two biggest polluters, China and the USA agreed to work together to cut emissions in the coming decades. This agreement was thin of detail but at least it's a start.

Net-zero pledges

COP26 President Alok Sharma noted that a few months ago, only about 30% of the global economy had net-zero emissions pledges for the coming decades. Now that number is close to 90 %, which is clearly some progress. The proof of the pudding will be if those pledges become the basis for action.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were 503 delegates at the Conference associated with the fossil fuel industry which was more than any single Country.

So, what is our next move?

I think that what COP 26 tells us is that we will all need to do more as private individuals and as a Parish if we believe in fairness and in the need to protect our Planet and all its people. After all most of the participating countries which made pledges at COP26 are answerable to their citizens. Therefore, as ever it will be up to each and every one of us to hold them to account and to demand that our Leaders follow through on their promises.

When I spoke at the Parish Forum, I referred to Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology Laudato Si which he addressed "to every single person living on this planet" urging each and every one of us to listen to "the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor". I make no apology for repeating what I said then: -

In his encyclical, Pope Francis said "We need a conversation which includes everyone since the environmental challenge we are undergoing and its human roots, concern and affect us all. Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes even on the part of believers can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions...everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation."

I concluded by saying that it was now up to us to do something. Well, our efforts to support the Camino demonstrates that there is a real desire to do what we can to prioritise Climate Justice and I am very proud of the work that the Parish of Our Lady of the Valley played in making it a success.

However, the Camino to COP experience was for me the start of my personal journey to get more involved in the fight to secure Climate Justice. All of us regardless of our resources make decisions every day that impact on Climate Change. For example, when we decide what tea to drink, or what coffee to buy, or what container we purchase our milk in. Sometimes I think that the giant corporations that we all rely on for essentials such as food, fuel and clothing make it deliberately hard for us to make ethical choices, but we must all continue to use our best efforts to overcome the confusion.

Upon speaking to one of the Walkers who went to Glasgow, the official COP26 Conference was not the main event. The fringe event was the more important as it brought together grass root activists, experts, and Indigenous communities, from all around the world, who shared their knowledge and experience. They were able to share information on projects and technologies that are already helping to improve all our lives and the lives of our children and grandchildren.

The pledges made by countries don't automatically translate into action they require new laws at the national level. In other words, everyone here has a say and a part to play when it comes to determining what our priorities are. We need to decide for ourselves what is important to us. We should ask ourselves whereabouts on our "To do list" does Climate Justice come? If it's pretty high up there, then it makes sense to pool our resources and to continue to reach out to other interested local groups and organisations so that we can continue to strive for a more informed community of people who are all willing to make the changes that are necessary to achieve Climate Justice.

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