

FPCT Justice and Peace Group, 10th March, 2015

Nine people took part in a discussion of issues relating to Fairtrade, as a celebration of Fairtrade fortnight. Before that we shared some points of positive good news in the world, because Mary reported Father Jon's assertion that every time we do a good action we help to overcome the forces of evil in the world.

Pat Fitzpatrick reported on a talk in Fairtrade Fortnight from a representative of the Fairtrade Foundation on the people behind such products as tea, cocoa and sugar and the meaning of fair trade. Surveys had shown that in the UK now 78% of people recognize the Fairtrade mark and 1.4 million farmers in 74 countries are now helped by Fairtrade, 23% of whom are women. This gives them fair prices, better working conditions and a stable future. Fairtrade tea helps to support access to clean water, a cocoa cooperative enables children to receive education and a sugar cooperative also supports education. But globally a very small percentage of these products are fairly traded: 10% tea, 1.2% sugar and less than 1% cocoa, although in the UK 40% of sugar is now fairtrade. From 2017 it will be harder for small-holders because the EU CAP is being taken off, so many sugar farmers are likely to go out of business. In Malawi and elsewhere the markets are protected by the EU CAP, so we need to push the EU on this. It was suggested that our *ACTION THIS MONTH* should be to add our names to the petition to MEPs to be found at www.fairtrade.org.uk/sugar .

During the discussion we were reminded that 4,500 products are now Fairtrade (including gold), but that last year sales of Fairtrade goods were down by 3.7%. We were told of a Fairtrade and craft shop in Camborne and encouraged to get supermarkets to stock more Fairtrade goods by asking for them and saying we will otherwise go elsewhere for them. We could make a Fairtrade challenge for Lent, by buying more Fairtrade items, sharing Fairtrade information and asking for more products. Flooding in Malawi in January had resulted in many deaths and many farmers' estates being lost, with devastated crops and a tea estate takes four years before the crop is ready to be picked. There is an appeal for donations on the Fairtrade Foundation's website. These will be matched by the shared interest organization.

The discussion then ranged more widely. Mary asked if there is a connection between food and Lent, because as Jesus on the cross said “I thirst” we should be thirsting for food justice. Cornwall is often portrayed as a posh place for food, but there is much poverty. She also mentioned the honey bee project and the relationship between bees and our food and the interconnectedness of our world, as in the effects of deforestation on climate change. We discussed the problem of low milk prices for dairy farmers, eggs, chickens, modern slavery and exploitation, which is now going to have a Cornish perspective, and the death of a Polish sailor on a bunkering ship. “Thinking deeply, travelling lightly” was a slogan we could adopt, as in the project looking at the miles travelled by the ingredients for pancakes.

Two others joined the group for the prayer for persecuted Christians, which was led by Maribel. She drew our attention to the positive things which are going on in the world in contrast to all the tragedies we hear of in the news and showed accounts of 18 year-olds smuggling Bibles in Vietnam and a young man whose faith and trust in God when a bus he was on had been stopped by guerrillas had resulted later in his persecutor coming to Christ. This is the good that we can do by following Jesus’ commands to “love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you”, and “let your light so shine ...”. In our prayers we also remembered Niger, one of the poorest countries on earth, but where Muslims and Christians have worked together, despite the Muslim faith being hijacked by terrorists. It is important for us to keep positive in the face of news such as that of the post Charli Hebdo attacks.

It was agreed that we should bring two positive items of news to the next meeting on 14th April.

Sue Mills