



AGM REPORT 2024

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St Hilda's Blessing

Presidents Report

It has been an immense privilege and at many times an overwhelming task to take on the role of president for the NBCW over this last year. I often think the first year of taking on any new responsibility feels like walking along a twisting path in the dark- you are never quite sure what is about to happen- good or bad! But then that is the path of faith where you have to rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and lean not on your own understanding. I have been really blessed in the support of our NBCW members who have exercised patience and fortitude as we try to discern the future in the backdrop of the universal synod that speaks so much about the role of women.

I believe what has been achieved in this year is a sense of new direction. There is so much being done for the mission, participation and communion of women which can be seen in the following report. There is much to celebrate and much still to be done. I believe we now have a plan- or at least the next steps of a plan to move us into the future.

As we reshape under the synodal themes, my role is going to focus around the key strategic areas for the NBCW of increasing the clarity, support, and personnel in the areas of diocesan links. I am also going to be exploring how we can build 'Communion' inside and outside of the organisation building a new way for Catholic women to network. Exciting times- always led by the Holy Spirit! A great development for the NBCW is the new website which we plan to launch on the 1st of March 2024, this will give us greater flexibility in building this network and sharing the Formation events that are designed to help women participate in faith and mission.

As the NBCW develops it has become apparent that we have an essential need to have administrative support. As I write this, we have interviews planned for an individual to join us who will manage the day-to-day communications of the organisation and ensure the new website is the main source of information and support. It is with heart-felt thanks that we say goodbye this year to Claire Paisley who has supported us as NBCW secretary. It is also with enormous gratitude that we accept that Susan Longhurst will be stepping away as Vice President due to increasing work commitments. Susan has been instrumental in the review of the organisation and the discernment process, and I am personally in debt to her for having had her support and friendship as we took on the NBCW leadership. Susan is going to continue to be part of the NBCW but will step down as Vice president from February 2024. The Executive Committee has met to discuss the implications of this and is re-organising its commitments to ensure the responsibility remains collegial.

Finally, I would like to say a huge thank you to you all, change is never easy and the work to advocate for women continues on stridently with all that you bring to the organisation. I ask for your collective prayers as we keep tuning into the Holy Spirit and making moves to improve the experience of faithful women.

Amy Cameron

Vice President Report

Who said retirement would be quiet and a time to step back a little? -Well, whoever that person was I need to meet them and tell them that they are wrong. When I was elected in February 2023 to be part of the NBCW collegiate leadership team as co-vice president along with Amy as president and Susan as equal co-vice president, I can honestly say I didn't know what I was letting myself in for and what the amount of work that leading such a prestigious organisation such as the NBCW would entail. However, after an initial meeting following the Connectives Review, I was soon to find out. Mercifully, I am not one to shirk from a challenge, and with the bit between my teeth and the determination not to let this organisation flounder, I embarked upon my role with verve and vigour, believing that it was God given and was part of my faith journey. Indeed, this last year, whilst it has been challenging, has also been exciting, and in an odd sort of way fulfilling, certainly a change from education.

Whilst initially I wasn't so sure about the value of the Connectives Review, as I began working with Amy and Susan in London, two visits to St Mary's Twickenham and many zoom meetings, to thrash out a strategic vision, aims and objectives, and a working plan, all inspired by the recommendations of the Review, I began to see its value. As I attended our gatherings, I often recalled the parable of the fig tree, in which Jesus spoke about pruning being necessary for survival of the Kingdom, if we didn't prune, we may not survive in this cutthroat world. We mused in these meetings that it looked as though in our time of leadership, whilst we might not like it at times, we have been given the task, not of maintaining, but of pruning and renewing and we realised the enormity of this difficult task. However, we prayed, and we turned to the Synod for the "manure", if you like, to undertake this root and branch reform, which we hoped in prayer that everyone would embrace.

Ostensibly it must have appeared to everyone that we, the leadership, had gone to ground - we hadn't, but in the months before the in-person meeting in June, many of the activities of the Board, excepting those of the Women in the Church Committee, appeared to go quiet, and I for one, who had attended nearly every event since I joined, at the end of Lockdown, began to wonder if we would be able to regenerate, re-energise and recreate anew, and whether we would have the support of everyone. At the in-person meeting in June we revealed our plan and asked those present to consider some proposals: a new name? -a new constitution? - reorganisation of the committees into task and finish groups?

We listened and following the June *in-person* meeting, we organised two further discernment meetings during the summer in which we discussed the importance of mending the diocesan link system. We also floated the idea of individual membership, which should, in theory give us more revenue, especially as organisations who shelter under our umbrella, to give them a voice, are also feeling the pinch may not be able eventually to pay their subscriptions. It cannot be underestimated just how much we need funds, and of tightening our belts if we want to do the work of creating a network for women and of creating a formation program so that women can use their voices effectively in mission- we need to be self-sustaining. At a subsequent meeting we revealed our aims which followed those of the Synod: Communion, Participation and Mission.

We had come a long way in the space of five/six months, but then I became aware of a very tight deadline for funding from the Bishop's Conference. I was tasked to convene a small task and finish group to advise on a funding application. Barbara expertly compiled the budget spread sheet against my amateurish costed out budget based on what the

committees had submitted as their needs for 2024. Then Amy and I compiled the impact narrative for the funding application CBCEW. We waited anxiously and heard in December that we had received £5000, this would give us a little breathing space, but the money had been identified for specifics.

In September after a discussion with Freda, who has been one of the linchpins of the organisation and a former president, I called the Conveners together for a meeting, and it was a joyous reunion. They hadn't met as a whole group since before the Review. Sadly, Freda felt unable to continue in her role, but was anxious that her legacy should continue. We have had two further meetings: November and January and there are plans afoot, which you can read in their individual reports. I can't say I enjoy taking the minutes of these meetings, and I have every respect for Freda who did them uncomplainingly, so will be glad when we appoint an administrator. (I am involved in ecumenism locally and I need some time to effectively contribute to this group as well as my charitable fundraising through my lectures.)

As I will have overall executive responsibility for the area of Formation, in September, I set about compiling another amateurish document: a diary of events, which I hoped would go online- it will. By this time, we had already had several discussions about a new website, and work was in progress to make this a reality. To use the adage that "there is no time like the present to get something going," I thought I would kickstart the Formation Programme by offering a lecture I had delivered before. So, on 28 September, the eve of the Feast of the Archangels I delivered a lecture on zoom, entitled *Angels: Origins and Beliefs*. Twelve people attended this lecture, and the reviews were very positive. Since then, I have tried to ensure there is something every month, and if there is a gap then I will try to fill it myself with one of my lectures. I gave the December webinar on *Mary and Her Gifts*, a talk I had given at a women's retreat in Somerset. I am fortunate that I have retained good contact with some of my students who are in postgraduate study at notable universities, and I hope that they will share the fruits of their theological studies with our organisation. (As I write this, I have today received an email from Pia who had to cancel her January webinar owing to this a severe illness- she hasn't been allowed to fly for six weeks, but is hoping to get back to Oxford next week to continue with her MA, and she is looking forward to September when she will give the planned webinar on *Hopelessly Hoping* to the Board.)

Probably the highlight of my year was going to Germany to the Andante Conference *Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue*. This was the first time I had represented a Catholic organisation of women, and as I had taken Amy's place I felt a great responsibility, not least because I was also representing our prestigious organisation. I have been to so many conferences during my professional career and I think I expected similar- lots of inspirational lectures, followed by workshops and discussion and an action plan. However, whilst there were outstanding lectures, workshops, and discussions at this event there was something else, a transcendent atmosphere which I call *Communitas* - I witnessed women in genuine solidarity with women who were passionate about the common good and about working for and advocating on behalf of the marginalised. This was the gospel in action- the subsequent action points following the lectures revealed that this was no militant activism, but a compassionate desire to be the active instruments of change for the disenfranchised and the outcast. The objective outcomes from the conference can be found under the Convenir Report for Education and I will not repeat them here, other than to draw on the words of Mary Ward who said "*In Time Women will do Much*"- and if women can be given opportunities to continue to be in solidarity with one another then in time it will surely be

possible that their words will generate an osmotic force which will infuse into the consciousness of others so that they can be instruments for change and lasting peace.

And so, to conclude, in these last few weeks I have been gathering reports, trying to generate interest for the NBCW, disseminating booklets and resources, organising Five Women Reflect on Hope, and subsequent press releases, maintaining good relationships with our Ukrainian religious sisters, Andante connections - I meet weekly to help one of the sisters improve her English. Amy and I converse regularly, and she really is the inspiration for me. We move forward together in collegiate style, it is my hope that we both can serve the NBCW effectively, as we move it forward into a turbulent but hopeful world, where women can be heard, given dignity, and be the instruments of mission so that the Kingdom of God can be made a living reality in our midst.

Written by Jacintha Bowe January 2024

Committees

During the Review process the Conveners did not meet as a whole group, however, in September after many discussions about the new strategic aims of the NBCW, they gathered for the first time to share the issues they had identified as being the priorities for 2024 in their specific areas. Therefore, the last few months of 2023, in the main, were spent on information gathering and restructuring so that each committee could respond more effectively to the needs of women.

Report from The Education Committee

It has always been one of the aims of this committee to publish a document for school leavers so that those young people who wished to could continue their ongoing formation. Often school leavers do not know where to go following their formal education, and sometimes university chaplaincies do not always fill the spiritual need. So, I'm pleased to report that this document is almost completed and is in Canva format awaiting the launch new website, where it will be placed so that young people and educational establishments can download it. We will not make paper copies of this leaflet, not least because we are working towards net zero, but also because we would like it to be regularly updated- a paper copy would be prohibitive and expensive to renew and update. Once launched, we will contact the Educational Advisers of all Catholic dioceses in England and Wales and invite them to alert the Catholic secondary schools and sixth forms about its existence.

Increasingly it has become obvious to this committee that part of its function is to assist Catholic Education, where it can, in compiling resources, or at least in directing schools and colleges to resources, which might not be obvious. In the future, therefore, this committee will move to task and finish groups, some signposting resources, some compiling lesson

plans and others developing podcasts, working across committees to harness best practice, skills, knowledge, and expertise. Once again, the launch of the new website will be vital in extending our outreach.

Education And Formation

Education isn't just the domain of the classroom and the young; it continues throughout life and recognising this the committee has facilitated three Formation webinars.

Webinars

Angels- Given on the eve of the Feast of the Archangels- 28th September, this webinar was broadcasted at short notice and was attended by 12 Catholic Women from different dioceses in England and Wales. The evaluations were very positive and indicated that there is a thirst for formation particularly from a woman's perspective.

Mary and Her Gifts- Talk and Ignatian Meditation Given as an Advent talk and meditation, this was attended by about 20 people again with good reviews.

Five Catholic Women Reflect on Hope. - This webinar, which replaced the scheduled one and which was compiled at short notice, exceeded all our expectations. Forty-Three participants zoomed in from all over England. Four of the five speakers were drawn from the different committees with the fifth speaker coming from the Bernardine Sisters, whose monastery, The Hyning, is based in Lancashire. However, two days before the conference we heard that a religious sister from the Ukraine would join as an speak about her experience of bringing hope to those living near the front line. Based in Zaporizhzhia which is situated 50 km from the frontier, her Monastery is in permanent danger, but this stoic woman, along with her community, continues to minister to the displaced and the homeless. This was an incredible event, and the reviews were astonishing. This event was reported on by the Tablet and also the Universe.

The impact of this webinar is difficult to quantify as the repercussions of hearing the words of someone who lives so near to the front-line impacts the hearer in a profound way which, like faith, is immeasurable. Since the webinar there have been offers of help, particularly with those suffering trauma- this could be the beginning a long relationship, though, with the sisters of St. Basil in Ukraine, and as such this relationship will bear witness that the NBCW is fulfilling its mission of standing in solidarity with the marginalised and those whose rights are being violated.

Attendance at the Andante Conference – 3 Outcomes

The Convenor of this committee is also the Vice President, and in this role, she attended the Andante Conference on Inter-Convictional and Inter-Religions dialogue in Augsburg. The impact of this conference, like the above, cannot be underestimated, and it is largely down to this conference that relationships have been established with religious sisters in Ukraine. These relationships have broadened our perspective and have provided a living and valuable witness to the principles of the Synod: that we be in Communion with, be in solidarity with the whole of the Body of Christ, those on the margins and those who are disenfranchised; that we actively Participate in the life of the Church, gaining wisdom, so that we can be fit for Mission.

A more hidden and little-known outcome is that attendance at the conference impacted positively on the life of a different Ukrainian



sister, who has been sponsored by a German charity to complete her PhD on trauma at the Gregorian University in Rome. This nun cannot speak English very well and sadly most of the textbooks are in English, so the convener of the Education Committee is now meeting online, voluntarily, once a week with this young sister to help her improve her English.

The third outcome is inspired by the Council of Europe, a delegate of which was present at the conference. A search of CoE website revealed a wealth of lesson plans which are written in English. Once the new website is up and running, the relevant links can be signposted on the Education page. There are plans to provide lesson resources based on the lectures given at the Andante conference, particularly those concerned with the methodology of Inter Faith Dialogue, a topic which features on the A level Religious Studies syllabus.

Planned Webinars

A planned webinar for June will see Catholic head teacher, Maria Young, speak about Catholic values within Catholic schools.

Ideas for the future

Female pupils and access to Technology in Catholic Schools

Restructure

Following the AGM, this committee will be placed under the umbrella of the new NBCW aim, **Participation**, and will work closely with Women in the Church Committee

Jacintha Bowe

Vice President and Convenor Education Committee

Report of the work of the Social Responsibility Committee for the year

Following my appointment as Convenor of the Social Responsibility Committee in September 2022, I have been focussed on deepening my knowledge of the issues raised in SRC meetings, namely poverty; prisons and the Criminal Justice system; Immigration, illegal Immigration and Asylum; and Racial Justice. As a committee, we have been engaged in research, reading reports and bills accessed through the internet, and updates in the press as well as attending meetings organised by other agencies, the most recent of which was the Criminal Justice Alliance 2023 meeting, organised by CSAN, which I attended in November 2023.

However, it was only after the NBCW board meeting in June 2023 that we began in earnest to consider how we could use the information and the research we have been gathering to prepare a campaign to highlight and raise awareness of issues affecting families and women, in particular, in the areas mentioned above. In this current febrile political environment and with so much at stake, as an advocacy committee this has become an urgent matter. We therefore welcome the NBCW's new Task and Finish (Action and Impact) approach.

So, in keeping with the approach, the Social Responsibility Committee has embarked on the preparation of a pre-election pamphlet to raise awareness among Catholic women of the social issues that we wish our MPs and future government to address. As the CBCEW expressed an interest in working with the NBCW on this pre-election planning, at our

meeting in November 2023, we divided ourselves into three working groups: (1) Poverty and Homelessness; (2) Prisons and the Criminal Justice system; and (3) Immigration/Asylum and Racial Justice. It was agreed that we would prepare papers, summary and briefing papers, in the aforementioned areas in preparation for a meeting with Greg Pope, CBCEW spokesman, on 8 December. Prior to this meeting, we held an Extraordinary Meeting of the SRC on 4 December to share our papers with other members. Our meeting with Greg was instructive. He highlighted certain guidelines for us to follow: 1. Reference to scripture and to the relevant Catholic Social Teaching; 2. Possible options or ways to address these issues; 3. Questions we wish to raise; and 4. Links to resources or original sources.

In the coming months, we expect to continue our work on the pamphlet with the inclusion of new salient material and to update our SRC profile on the NBCW website. As most of the work is completed, we hope that the finished product will be ready for our next meeting in March. Once this material has been approved, it will be published on the NBCW website. We hope that the meeting on Catholic Planning for the General Election on 29 February, organised by Greg Pope with Catholic agencies, will add greater insight and direction to our work.

In addition to the Pre-election pamphlet, we discussed ideas for two webinars. At our most recent meeting in January 2024, we proposed to hold one in April (possibly on 16, 17 or 18 April) in time for the run-up to the Local Government elections in May, since many of these issues are dealt with at a local / regional level; and another in September, assuming an October General Election. If the GE is earlier, then the latter webinar will take place in the preceding month. We also discussed possible speakers. Louise Casey was mentioned and possibly someone from a local authority. It was agreed, however, that we should consider someone who might accept a charitable donation for their organisation by way of payment. A few suggestions were mentioned, among them a representative from CAFOD, Jesuit Refugee Council or the Rowntree Housing Trust, as well as Church Action on Poverty and Let's End Poverty. We have also been informed that CAFOD/SVP will be running training sessions on Zoom in February to help women to look at issues, formulate questions for MPs and how to respond to them. More information on this will be circulated later.

In conclusion, the Task and Finish approach has been instrumental in providing a practical focus for all the work we have been doing, reminding us always to aim for a tangible outcome which will prove useful to others. I trust that, by the end of the process, this is what we will have done.

Rose Cartledge
Convenor of Social Responsibility Committee

Report Women in the Church committee

Who are we?

The women in the Church committee of the National Board of Catholic women are made up of nine women representing a range of Dioceses including Southwark, Westminster, Northampton, Arundel and Brighton, and Clifton.

How do we meet?

We meet on zoom approximately 4 times during the year, usually on a Saturday morning. Our gatherings including a time of prayer, a sharing of activities and experiences relating to women in ministry in our Dioceses, and a focus on our current projects.

Current projects and activities

We are currently working on a series of webinars. In March we completed the waiting series with *Waiting for the Gift* by Sr Gemma Simmonds. We now have a new series, 'Inspiring women'. Our first speaker was Tina Beattie in November. The next webinar is March 16th *Women and Synodality*, Avril Baigent and Helen Burgess from the Northampton Diocese. The final webinar for June is in the planning stage on the same theme.

The committee also support the NBCW book club which meets on zoom providing an opportunity to read and enjoy literature written by female ecclesiologists. Books studied include *Forty Women* Ros Clarke, *The Four steps of love* Fiona Gardner and more recently *Icons of Christ* Phyllis Zagano. The committee have an active WhatsApp group and share current discussions and themes relating to women in the church.

Helen Burgess Convenor

Report Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Committee

Structure

The structure of the committee is now based around a maximum of three task and finish groups, which can meet and work independently, and with less frequent meetings of the whole committee. The benefits of this structure are more focus on productivity from the task and finish groups, and ease of scheduling smaller meetings with fewer attendees.

Task and Finish Groups

The three current task and finish groups are:

- 1. The Annulment Task and Finish Group** This group is led by Dr Susan Longhurst, and includes committee members Dr Elizabeth Dalgarno and Prof Caroline Moore as well as 2 additional members who are experts by experience. The group has partnered with St Mary's University to undertake a 2-year research project exploring the experiences of domestic abuse survivors of the Catholic annulment process. The research proposal highlights the dangers posed by perpetrators having access to statements made by victim/survivors and witnesses. It also highlights the impact of the fact that domestic abuse is not currently recognised as a reason for annulment in Cannon Law. Proposed outcomes of the study are a revised guidance document on the annulment process and safety of victims and witnesses, as well as opening a dialogue regarding the way domestic abuse is understood in Cannon Law.
- 2. The Intersectional Justice Task and Finish Group** This group is led by Nikki Dhillon Keane, Yogi Sutton and Sara Kirkpatrick and is in the process of identifying external members with relevant experience. The group recognises the intersection of Violence Against Women and Girls with other forms of oppression, and the necessity of adopting an intersectional lens when approaching these issues. The aim is to produce a guidance document for the whole Catholic Church on intersectional justice. The document should equip people to adopt an intersectional lens with which to approach not only the work of the VAWG committee, but all activities carried out in the Church. Issues around disability and Deafness, LGBTQIA+ and racial justice will

be explored in depth, but the document will aim to foster awareness and inclusion of all groups who experience oppression and or exclusion. Members of other committees who would be like to share expertise and contribute to the document are invited to contact Nikki Dhillon Keane. It is proposed that at least 12 months would be required for the document to be created.

- 3. *The Exploitation and Pornography Task and Finish Group*** This group, led by Jo Thompson, is forming with partnerships with Bakhita House and Women at the Well to produce a briefing document on exploitation of women and pornography. It is possible that another task and finish group partnering with the education committee could arise out of completion of this work.

Events:

The VAWG committee partners with the CSAN Domestic Abuse Alliance to create twice -yearly webinars on domestic abuse and related issues. A webinar was hosted on 20th November ahead of the 16 days of activism to end VAWG. This was a closed group, only CSAN and NBCW members were allowed to register. Over

Resources:

The VAWG committee is now responsible for the NBCW Domestic Abuse booklet and raising awareness of the booklet.

In partnership with the CSAN Domestic Abuse Alliance and Caritas Safe in Faith, we have produced a calendar of suggested actions for the 16 days (including downloading our DA booklet) This calendar can be shared with NBCW committees and members, and we encourage everyone to share it widely.

Welsh Government's Equality and Social Justice committee

The VAWG Committee submitted evidence for the consultation carried out by the Welsh Government's Equality and Social Justice committee which was investigating a public health approach to tackling violence against women and girls. The Committee submitted evidence from a Faith perspective. Contributing to the evidence was our committee member Sara Kirkpatrick, CEO of Welsh Women's Aid.

Nikki Dhillon Keane

NBCW Annual Ecumenical Committee Report 2023

AGM 2024

Much has changed on this committee since last year when it was agreed to separate the work for Church Unity and Interfaith dialogue. Though they do have elements in common, the focus is different and the impetus for each is better addressed with two separate committees. A new Ecumenical Committee convenor was appointed, Jane Lavery, already an active member of the committee.

Meanwhile in 2023 committee members have attended bi-monthly Zoom meetings, reporting from their organisations, (See members list below). The main thrust of the committee however has been to continue our focus on **Receptive Ecumenism** and its significance in **The Synodal Pathway**. The emphasis on the ecumenical element, listening to other churches, and engagement in dialogue, in the first discernment document affirmed our focus.

Drawn to the ecumenical and interfaith dimensions of the synodal pathway, and to learn from other churches and other faiths, a particular interest is in the similarity between the Synodal Process and Receptive Ecumenism, particularly in regard to listening and discernment, the committee organised a Zoom webinar during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with Clare Watkins as main speaker, and opportunities for discussions in break-out rooms: *Discerning the Body: Theology, spirituality and practices for Christians walking together an examination of the discernment process in relation to ecumenism*. The subsequent discussion was thoughtful.

In June two committee members, Jane Lavery and Janet Ward, together with several other NBCW members in different capacities, were invited to join the Durham Symposium, 'to explore the contribution that receptive ecumenical learning might make to the current Catholic synodal pathway (with the latter being regarded as being the most significant initiative in Catholic reform since the Second Vatican Council) with around 120 participants in total, half of these coming from the six partner UK Christian traditions with whom we engaged during the course of the symposium. The event was built around a small group synodal process, with ten groups of twelve members, and each group including: a representative (theologian or church leader/senior minister) of the six other UK Christian traditions, an English and Welsh Catholic bishop, a woman and man lay Catholic leader, a consecrated religious; a member of the faithful (laity and clergy) of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle; a Catholic theologian, and various other participants with relevant experience and expertise'.

This symposium has been reported elsewhere, but it was particularly valued as a unique opportunity to engage at this level as Catholic women. The follow up meeting in London in September was reported by Jane for the NBCW meeting in October.

World Day of Prayer (WDP), formerly Women's World Day of prayer:

Later in the year following the earlier resignation of Suzanne O'Malley, interviews were held, and Margaret Clark was recommended for appointment by Cardinal Vincent Nichols as the national Catholic representative. She has taken on her new role with enthusiasm and will be offering information about the forthcoming World Day of Prayer on 1st March. It is hoped that Catholic women will take this annual ecumenical opportunity to join other Christians in prayer.

NBCW Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee

World Day of Prayer (WDP)- Margaret Clark WDP Catholic Representative National Committee



WDP is a global ecumenical movement, formerly known as Women's World Day of Prayer, led by Christian women who welcome you to join in prayer and action for peace and justice, inspired by the motto "Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action." It is a privilege therefore, to represent Catholic women on the World Day of Prayer (WDP) National Committee.

An ecumenical group of Palestinian Christian women have prayed and reflected together over several years to respond to an invitation to write the 2024 service. As Pope Francis asserts, Palestinian people and the people of Israel "have the right to peace". Their theme of the service is "I Beg You... Bear With One Another in Love," Ephesians 4:1-7, despite all difficulties and

oppression.

The Palestinian women invite the world to pray for peace, justice, freedom of religion and freedom of movement. Their prayers specifically call us to pray with women refugees, homeless, sick, dying and grieving. They acknowledge the environmental crisis and pray to be united in treating all with justice and love. In the current situation prayers are needed more than ever for peace. A WDP statement has already been given, and an updated statement will be made on Ash Wednesday, 14 February, to be read at all World Day of Prayer meetings on 1 March 2024. This will be available on the website Wwdp.org.uk. No amendments to the WDP Order of Service should be made.

Additionally, since joining the National Committee I have attended several meetings. The first was a Link Day to be introduced to other Christian women, to listen and observe. It was evident from this that there is more that unites us than divides us, which reinforced my experience of working with Churches Together, and now on the Synodal Journey.

Resources for the Preparation Days, for March 2024 have been forwarded to each of the Branch secretaries throughout the British Isles, including a WDP magazine and WDP Order of Service. Access to all of these can be found on the website Wwdp.org.uk.

You are all encouraged to join a World Day of Prayer service in your area and to encourage others to do so. Our prayers have never been more needed.

NBCW Leaflet on sharing communion: Who can receive Communion with us?

The leaflet continues to be popular, and has been revised and reprinted. It is also available on-line on the NBCW website, but many people find the leaflet very user-friendly.

Committee Membership to February 2023 AGM:

Jane Lavery, Convenor

Sister Brigid Collins: Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW)

Freda Lambert: Andante

Helen Mayles: Association for Interchurch Families (AIF)

Ann Smith: Birmingham diocese

Margaret Clark: World Day of Prayer

Janet Ward: former Convenor NBCW Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee.

Janet Ward

Report Science Health and Bioethics Committee

1. The Science Health and Bioethics Committee has conferred online during the last year and continues to monitor key areas of concern including life issues, artificial intelligence, and the environment.

2. Life Issues

It seems likely that euthanasia, or assisted dying, will return to parliament in the next session – after the general election – possibly as a government bill. It is important that we emphasise the importance of good quality palliative care being made available to everyone who needs it by the NHS. The focus of those who care for the dying should be on pain control, comfort and support.

There is some concern about the ease with which women can obtain abortion pills by post, without medical consultation or advice. This has meant that abortions may have taken place after the foetus is viable, or very close to viability [at about 22-24 weeks]. Under current legislation this is a criminal offence.

Decriminalisation of abortion is being proposed by MPs through amendments to current legislation before parliament. Changes to the surrogacy law are also being considered and we are working on this issue and will be bringing it to the attention of the Board later this year.

3. Artificial Intelligence

Pope Francis has made AI the theme of two recent messages, for the World Day of Peace, and for the World Day of Social Communications. We recommend that everyone who is interested or concerned should read these papers.

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/20231208-messaggio-57giornatamondiale-pace2024.html>

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20240124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>

In each case the Pope emphasises the need for human direction and control of AI systems to ensure that they are used for the common good and to further human flourishing.

4. Environment

Tensions continue to rise between care for our common home and the desire we all have to live comfortable lives and enjoy as we can the world around us. What is clear is that we

know what we must do to keep global temperatures at a manageable level, and the science exists to enable this to be done. But whether it is politically possible to make the radical changes to our lifestyles and economic and social systems that will be necessary to achieve global net zero is moot.

We are concerned about issues such as clean water, clean air, access to the countryside, education for environmental responsibility, access to good quality food for all, and accountability and responsibility for the protection of people and the planet by those in government and its agencies.

Conclusion

Pope Francis writes: 'Before all else, we need to set aside catastrophic predictions and their numbing effects'. He reminds us that in the Bible 'the heart is seen as the place of freedom and decision making'. Let us pray for wisdom of the heart in facing the very great challenges that face us in this rapidly changing world.

Patricia Stoa, Mary McHugh

Report Interfaith Committee

The Interfaith Committee is a new venture for NBCW and began life as a spin-off from the Ecumenical Committee. I am grateful to Cathy Wattebot for keeping Interfaith on the NBCW radar for many years. In this time of increasing diversity of faith and belief in our communities it seems appropriate to look again at how we can develop an interfaith conversation for women.

As convenor of this Committee, and with my extensive experience of interfaith dialogue, I was invited to speak at the Andante Study Days in Augsburg in Germany in October 2023. I was impressed by the speakers from across Europe who contributed to the Study Days, including women from Poland, France, Germany and the Netherlands, Ukraine and Latvia. I was also interested to learn about the Council of Europe and the work the Council does on interfaith and interconvictional dialogue.

The Report on the Study Days is on the Andante website <https://www.andante-europa.net/>
The role of International Non-Governmental Organisations such as Andante at the Council of Europe can be explored at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo>

If you are interested in joining the Interfaith Committee, please contact me:

pmstoat@gmail.com

Patricia Stoa

International Committee Report 2023

Report International Committee

In May 2023, Margaret Clark and Maureen Meatcher attended the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) General Assembly in Assisi, Italy. The meeting began in Rome with a private audience with Pope Francis, who applauded the work of the women's organisations and gave his blessing for successful conclusions. Of the resolutions proposed to the assembly, six were agreed to form the basis of work for the next four years. The first resolution that "WUCWO and its member organisations will consolidate, develop and extend the World Women's Observatory", to reach all regions of the world, as an appropriate mechanism to regularly listen to as many women as possible, especially the most

vulnerable, to help transform their lives by generating pastoral strategies, NGO synergies, public policies, and contributions to the international agenda. The sixth resolution was in response to Pope Francis' call for women to change the mentality of the prevailing culture leadership and responsibilities in the search for the common good, being promoters of a culture of life and care that fosters peace working with others to change the mentality of the prevailing culture.

The WUCWO resolutions confirmed the importance of the work that the International Committee has been involved in this year. The focus of our work has been meeting with organisations and government ministers to prepare for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) which takes place in New York each March. CSW is the main global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Member states, women's rights organizations as well as UN entities gather to discuss the progress and gaps in implementing the [1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#). Once a year CSW meets at the United Nations Headquarters in New York for two weeks around International Women's Day. (8th March). Members of the NBCW International Committee join with likeminded women's organisations in the UK Civil Society Women's Alliance (UKCSWA). More specifically, the CSW Alliance, organises civil society in the UK so that it can have more effective outcomes at CSW and after. It works with other groups to provide up to date information to those attending CSW or interested in it. The Alliance works closely with the Government Equality Office, and they state that it is the agency with which they work regarding CSW and civil society. The principal output of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) is the agreed conclusions on priority themes set for each year. Agreed conclusions contain an analysis of the priority theme and a set of concrete recommendations for governments, intergovernmental bodies and other institutions, civil society actors and other relevant stakeholders, to be implemented.

Previous year's outcomes for NBCW, have resulted in the establishment of the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Committee to advance work on Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse, previously undertaken by the Social Responsibility Committee. In 2023 Sr Lynda Dearlove was able to organise an event held in the first week of CSW, it was a side event (not held in the United Nations building, however advertised through official CSW networks) and was titled "Pornography and/ as Misogyny: How Pornography Drives Violence Against Women and Children". The aim was to highlight exploitation and violence against women driven by pornography; the review theme of CSW67 was "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". This has resulted in the Education Committee and VAWG Committee proposing to work together researching the influence of pornography on violence against women and girls.

The themes for CSW 68 are:

Priority theme: Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.

Review theme: Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls ([agreed conclusions](#) of the sixty-third session)

The International Committee has been able to contribute to the gathering of information on issues to do with poverty, through the work of the Social Responsibility Committee. The work done by faith communities in international social action is respected and valued, especially as the UN agencies are recognising the need to change the focus on the empowerment of individuals and corporations to the wellbeing and sustainability of communities.

Maureen Meatcher
Convenor International Committee

Reports from Diocesan Links

Arundel & Brighton- Sue Petritz

Please see Newsletter at the end of this document to gain insight into NBCW in Arundel & Brighton

Birmingham- Angela Foster has sent her apologies this round due to a family bereavement. We keep Angela and her family in our prayers.

Hexham & Newcastle – Amy Cameron



In December 2023, we had an Advent retreat for women. The purpose of the Advent retreat was two-fold. It intended to offer women the opportunity for formation at a time of year when they were under increased pressure. Secondly, it was to build positive associations with the name of the NBCW and to form a local network to strengthen the communion of women in the Hexham & Newcastle Diocesan base.

The theme of the retreat was “To be loved and to love” and focused on the unconditional, unfailing love of God that enables us to love others with joy. We explored the Visitation and what it can teach us about women walking with women to enable each other to fulfil Christ’s Mission. We took time out to reflect, to talk in pairs, to pray, to lay our burdens in the manger, and to make Advent wreaths.

The retreat was very powerful, as can be seen through the following feedback:

“The theme, the setting and the people there made it an occasion that everyone present needed. The input was amazing and the fellowship was powerful. We packed in a lot in the 24 hours we were there but in the most beautiful way.” AW

"I really enjoyed the coming together with other women, the space to share and to be, the input from different people of varying age and life experience and wisdom, the social time, the time out. The wreath making workshop was something I particularly enjoyed too and it was a lovely way to end the time!" MV

"I have experienced some light in my lingering darkness. I am aware of my need to meet and pray with women more regularly. Women have positive power and wisdom in abundance. I've reclaimed my joy that I feel had been stolen from me earlier this year." AM

"This retreat has given a new sense of hope, it gave me chance for a break and physical recharge. I feel like I was blessed abundantly in every moment there" HC

"I enjoyed everything about this retreat, it was thought provoking, personal and relevant to my life. There was input and time for quiet. And I loved the music!" EN

"I cannot remember the last time I went on a retreat for myself. I think it's been about 10 years. However, I've just had the most incredible 24 hours with a group of amazing, inspiring, powerful, loving, caring, beautiful, holy women. We've laughed, we've cried, we've prayed, we've sang, we've had a quiz, we've eaten and we've been creative and met new friends and reunited with old. So, so amazing. Beautiful venue, beautiful place. Just brilliant and so pleased I went." MP

"I've had the most incredible Advent Women's Retreat this weekend! I am so grateful to have been asked along to provide music. I received so much from time out with amazing women, all varying in age, life experience and wisdom. Feeling well and truly topped up and ready to face this final week! We're nearly there!" MK

"At this retreat I was able to have time to rest, be restored, share with others and receive from them. I was also reaffirmed in my gift of music and prayer. I was so grateful to be asked along on this retreat. I really did feel like I was given a gift. I arrived feeling a little burdened and stressed. I left feeling empowered, strengthened and filled up again." MV

When asked: 'Would you choose to attend future retreats led by the diocese or sponsored by the National Board of Catholic Women?' the answer was "Definitely" "Absolutely" "Definitely!" "YES"

The attendees have joined a WhatsApp group and asked to meet again in a couple of months' time.

Liverpool Archdiocese- Pat Murphy

Archbishop Malcolm is very supportive of the NBCW and has invited me to join the Archbishop's council committee, which will include me reporting back to him and the committee. Since Covid there have been a few women's groups popping up around the Liverpool Archdiocese, as you know organisations such as UCM and CWL are dying out. However, what came out of the Liverpool Synod was the need for accompaniment and the need to meet people where they are in their faith at the moment. It is a slow process but

discussing with the Archbishop our aim is to set a group up in each deanery over the next couple of years.

Northampton Diocese-Helen Burgess



As the Diocesan link for the Northampton Diocese, I have continued this year to share the work of the National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW) with the women of the Diocese. I am in the fortunate position of being an active lead in my Diocese in relation to conversations relating to women in ministry. This gives me the opportunity to promote the NBCW as well. Over the last year I have met at least twice with my Bishop David Oakley to reflect on women in ministry in the Diocese and this would include reflections on the Diocesan link role. Bishop

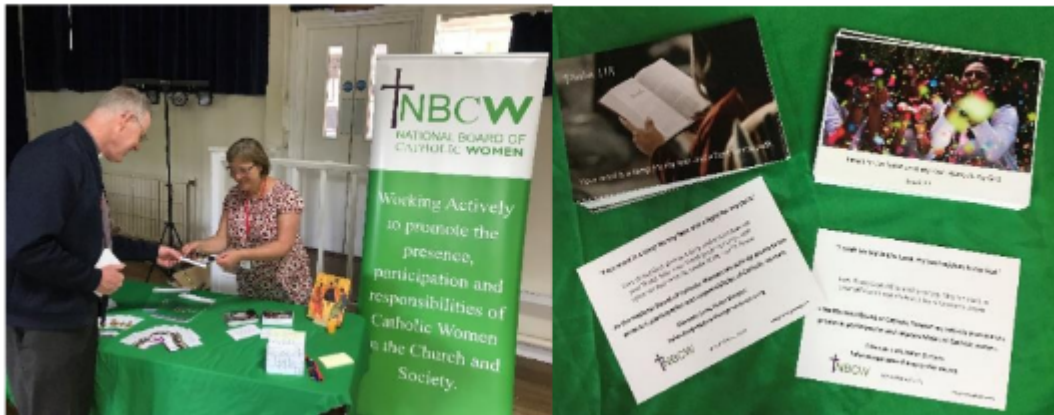
David is very supportive and interested in what we are doing. We also have an Episcopal vicar who I meet with as well to discuss the role/ work of women in ministry in my Diocese.

A highlight of the year has been the Diocesan Assembly in July in which I led the Women's working party, one of five working parties especially selected for the assembly. I also set up a stall for the NBCW promoting our work and with the help of Sister Miriam (Women in the Church Committee) produced postcards with a scripture verse and my Diocesan link contact details. Three women from the Women in the Church committee attended the assembly in different roles and were able to help with the 'stall'.

As part of my Diocesan link role, I was also able to visit a pastoral area to share about the NBCW and the recent Diocesan assembly, as well as facilitating discussion in relation to women in ministry at this time. I was also able to promote the NBCW, setting up a stall with the NBCW banner on display. As a women's working party, we are hoping to facilitate further pastoral area visits.

A further development as a Diocesan link has been to improve communication in the Diocese in relation to the NBCW and women in ministry. We have a web page on the Diocesan web site, and I can advertise on this any NBCW events. There is also a link to the NBCW web page. I have also developed a mailing list and a 'WhatsApp' group. Finally at a parish level I have gathered a group of interested women and whenever we have an NBCW Women in the Church webinar I host an event in my parish, and we log on together as a group. The next webinar on March 16th features the pastoral ministry officer from my diocese Avril Baigent and myself speaking about the synod and the work we have been doing in relation to women in ministry. The NBCW will I am sure get a mention! There is still much to be done and there are many women in the Diocese who are not aware of the board,

but I will endeavour to continue to improve this perspective.



Plymouth Diocese- Susanne Kowal

The diocese has been without a bishop since April 2022. This has led to a lot within the diocese being on hold. On the 23-25th February, we have our annual "Gather Conference" - residential + non-residential - attended by about 150-170 people. Not all women, though about 80% are - and quite a few clergy. It is quite a synodal event! This is a faith-building/faith-developing and faith-sharing event, this year on the theme of Joy. I have always used this to network with women in this Diocese and will continue to do so this year.

Salford Diocese -Charlotte Hibbert

This January, we come to the end of the first key stage of our diocesan synod. "The Big Listen", has been a journey which began in October 2023 and during that time, we have been working to engage with as many people as possible to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing our diocese, and how God might be calling us to respond.

Throughout the process, we asked parishes, schools, groups, and individuals to help us by reflecting on and responding to four key questions that help us identify the role and mission of the Church in our diocese today.

Responses are being gathered by Synod members through Big Listen events in parishes across the diocese, in addition to specific groups such as young adults, LGBT+ Catholics, and Caritas Diocese of Salford service users. Our Youth Ministry team has also been visiting schools and colleges across the diocese to hear from the youngest members of our diocesan community as well.

For anyone unable to attend a Big Listen event, responses could also be made online via our Synod Portal.

We await the outcomes of this exercise within the Diocese and I have been sure to discuss the NBCW agenda and issues effecting women in our Diocese. I have asked to be apart of the working party.

Report of Diocesan Link for Arundel & Brighton for 2023 provided for NBCW AGM 21 February 2024

As Diocesan Link a major part of my role is to pass on information from the Board to the women of my Diocese, and in turn report back to the Board, sharing the hopes and concerns of those women. This has meant my attending events with a varied focus so as to network and increase my knowledge base, which I have then been able to share.

In the past year the role has involved me in attending over one hundred meetings and events. I have attended all Board meetings and been an active participant at meetings set up for the purpose of discerning the path ahead for the NBCW, and I have provided feedback. I see it as important for the future growth, that decisions affecting the use of NBCW resources are properly discussed and communicated amidst a background of transparency and accuracy.

During 2023 the Synodal process has been a big focus. I joined the Synod listening webinars with Northampton Diocese and was invited to attend their Diocesan Assembly as an observer. I have continued to follow and promote the School for Synodality. Accepting an invitation to the UCM diocesan AGM, I met officers from the Church of England Mothers Union group of Chichester and was invited and attended their Spring Gathering and later their AGM.

As a member of Women in the Church Committee I have continued to promote our Book Club, and plan and publicise speakers for our webinars encouraging women to attend as a group or individually to hear Dr Gemma Simmonds: *Waiting for the Gift*, and Professor Tina Beattie: *Inspiring Women*.

I have been able to publicise the NBCW and explain my role through an editorial on the A&B E-Bulletin, and an interview on the NBCW website. Speaking for Cafod in my parish in the Fix the Food campaign and encouraging signatures for Salina's seeds in July, I was able to follow this through to being part of the march to the World Bank's London office to hand in the signatures on October 11th: another event I was able to publicise.

While I regularly send press releases to the A&B E-Bulletin, these aren't always included due to limits on space. So I prepare and email an A4 newsletter at the start of each month, on which I share the many events and initiatives I have familiarised myself with. This I email to every parish in the diocese and it is proving to be a productive means of communication, as each month I receive feedback from new contacts. To reach all the women in my diocese this is the most effective means. I ask for it to be printed out for the notice board and to be mentioned in the parish newsletter or website. My aim is for every parish to publicise it. As an ecumenical initiative, I was asked and I do, send my newsletter to the Mothers Union.

Sue Petritz

Diocesan Link

FEBRUARY 2024 News from your Diocesan Link



Celebration of St. Bakhita Day, 8th February, |
International Day of Prayer and against Human Trafficking.

NBCW are looking for a Catholic woman with superhero admin IT skills to support the leadership, manage emails, zoom and publicity: part-time £15 per hr. Interviews are on 9th February. For full details see <https://www.nbcw.co.uk/news>

**8 February @
Baroness Hollis**
introducing herself to
The webinar will give
President and to ask
advance



7:30 pm - 8:30 pm Catholic Union President

who took over as President in November 2023, will be members and supporters of the Catholic Union in a webinar. people across the country the opportunity to meet our new questions. The event is free but people do need to register in on [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com) to receive the link.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

16th February 12 noon – 1pm RESTORED. Hear their vision of a network of churches equipped to responding well to disclosures of domestic abuse so that those who are subjected to it can find a place of welcoming community.

<https://restored.cademy.co.uk/becoming-a-beacon-of-hope-restored-beacons>

Safe in Faith is a project of Caritas Westminster. They are running free and low cost workshops on domestic abuse, trauma and faith throughout the year, starting in March.

12th March NBCW's VAWG committee, along with CSAN's Domestic Abuse Alliance are hosting a webinar to launch **Safe in Faith's signposting toolkit** and the Faith and VAWG Coalition's guidance for Faith Leaders responding to domestic abuse.

INSPIRING WOMEN: Women and Synodality SATURDAY 16TH MARCH, 2024

11.00am-
will explore
voice of
University of
for Synodality
co-lead for



12.45pm. Avril Baigent and Helen Burgess
the synodal journey and encounter the
women. Helen is the lead Chaplain at the
Bedfordshire. Avril is co-director of the School
and the pastoral ministry advisor and synod



the Diocese of Northampton. Join as individuals or a Parish group.

For zoom link please contact nbcw@abdiocese.org.uk

To share your parish/organisation's news please contact Sue Petritz

nbcw@abdiocese.org.uk Diocesan Link for Arundel & Brighton

Actively promoting the presence, participation & responsibilities of Catholic Women

Reports from Organisations and Associations

Report on the Catholic Union Parliamentary & Public Affairs Committee

I attend this Committee, which meets monthly online while Parliament is sitting, on behalf of NBCW, and also serve as Secretary to the Committee. Mary McHugh also attends the meetings and speaks for NBCW.

The PPAC has expanded its membership in the last year to include representatives of more Catholic organisations, including CAFOD, SVP, Aid to the Church in Need, and Dignity in Dying. Longer term members include the Catholic Medical Association and Right to Life. The CBCEW is also represented on the PPAC.

Key issues for the PPAC include:

The cap on numbers of Catholic children permitted in new Catholic free schools [50% of admissions]: the 'Scrap the Cap' campaign aims to remove the cap and enable the opening of more Catholic schools.

Free speech and freedom of assembly: the PPAC has opposed limiting the right to keep vigil outside abortion clinics.

Rights at work: the right to religious expression in the workplace – wearing a cross or hijab – is a fundamental freedom and should be respected. The PPAC is also concerned about protecting the right to freedom of conscience in the workplace.

The cost of living, the cap on benefits for families with more than two children, and restoring the foreign aid budget are also issues on which the PPAC has been active.

Patricia Stoa

Andante report for the NCBW 2024

Andante have been fully engaged with the synodal process and considerable energy has been put into consultation and feedback via zoom with our member organisations throughout Europe. We were able to consult and produce a report for the continental phase of the synod, which for Europe happened at the Prague meeting, and one of our members was present in the Swiss delegation.

The theme of the study days for 2023 was inter-religious and interconvictional dialogue and we held a highly successful conference in Augsburg. One of our speakers was Gabriel Frey who is a representative at the Council of Europe, so we were able to discuss and plan how as Christians we can exert our influence at the Council of Europe, where we have voting rights as an international non-governmental organisation. A full report, written by NBCW member Patricia Stoa, who was also an excellent speaker at Augsburg, and the final statement can be found on the Andante Europa website.

Sophie Rudge

SHCJ Associate Report for NBCW AGM 2024

The SHCJ associates are slowly recovering from Covid and beginning to meet in person, although we are keeping the best practices from Covid times in meeting for prayer monthly

with the whole society via zoom, which also enables the more elderly members, who are reluctant to travel, to keep in touch.

We managed an in person AGM and Sarah Adams who attended the Prague meeting of the synod as part of the England and Wales delegation spoke about her experience there. The associates are very keen to keep engaged with the synodal process and we will have a further zoom with our international SHCJ associates to update and report prior to September 2024.

The highlight of 2023 was our international gathering in Chile attended by over forty associates, where we worked on the saying of Cornelia Connelly, our foundress, "The boat has sailed, now we need to row". Cornelia's vision was attending to "the wants of the age", and we all decided working for peace was critical for all continents, especially as Israel was devastating Palestine at the time of our meeting. We shall be holding a Spring meeting at Wistaston Hall and this will be absolutely at the top of our agenda.

Work carries on supporting the centre for the homeless in Salford and our monthly regional prayer groups continue.

Sophie Rudge

The NEWMAN ASSOCIATION

Promoting open discussion and greater
understanding in today's Church

The Newman Association report to NBCW

During 2023, women constituted half of Council members. Of the 45 or so talks given by Newman Circles or the Association, one-third were given by women. A similar proportion of women also had articles or texts of their talks published in the *The Newman* journal.

Talks on the Synod were given by the authors Christopher Lamb and Austen Ivereigh, which is available on the website <https://www.newman.org.uk/> and the Newman Association sponsored the Bishop Dunn Memorial lecture given by Sr Nathalie Becquart. Brian Hamill and Sophie Rudge, President and Secretary, respectively, attended the Durham conference, "Learning Together on the Way," which it part sponsored. A Circle talk was also given in Hertfordshire almost immediately after the October 2023 Synod meeting held in Rome, and the Book Club of that Circle has studied the chapters on Women, and, Priests and Deacons.

A series of four talks on Vatican II were hosted by the Ealing Circle and are available in the selection of videos on YouTube @EalingStBenedicts. The November edition of *The Newman* journal includes a text of Austen's Ivereigh's talk, and, a summary of a talk by Catherine Pepinster (The Crown and the Cross) reflecting on the recent Coronation and the British monarchy's relation to religious faith, Christian or other. At a Pax Romana Conference in

December in Bratislava, Alex Mthobi, Vice-President of the Newman Association, gave a talk on the theme, *Reality: hot wars, violence, and neo-colonialism*. Alex described the complex situations arising from decolonisation: assumptions that the UK and other western countries are champions of human rights, the gaps in human rights policies in international law, and the impacts of remnants of colonialism on previously colonised countries.

Several of the Circles are operating excellent programmes and these can be accessed through the website. The website also has back issues of the Journal and investment in 2024 should result in enhanced availability of resources.

People often comment that one of the great benefits of the Newman Association and its Circles is in offering a "safe space", private or more public, for advocacy, contradiction and intellectual debate about religious matters. The national Council encourages and supports the activities of Circles - where only half-a dozen people are needed for critical mass!

Barbara Bolgiano and Anthony Baker

February 2024



The Role of Women in Marriage Care During 2023

Over 2023 Marriage Care has largely focused on continuing to deal with the aftermath of the pandemic. Its effects have altered the landscape in which we are now working considerably. For instance, we have seen an unprecedented increase in the number of clients waiting to use our low-cost Relationship Counselling Service alongside a decrease in the number of couples marrying within the Church and subsequent, yet not as significant decrease, in the number of couples using our Marriage Preparation Service. Like all organisations who rely on volunteers to carry out their work, we saw a reduction in our numbers or a scaling down in the hours offered by some. As a charity we face unprecedented financial challenges at a time when we are needed more than ever.

However, alongside the challenges 2023 has also seen many positives. We continue to make the most of the opportunities brought by the forced switch to online working, with most of our counselling and marriage preparation sessions taking place via Zoom; this has allowed us greater flexibility alongside a reduction in costs. As the year progressed, we continued to re-establish our in-person services which gives couples and volunteers greater choice, accessibility, and flexibility. This was seen in other areas of our work too, such as within the ongoing and initial training of our volunteers, regular meetings, and networking opportunities.

Some of the other projects that resonate with the work of the Board are a review and subsequent update of our Domestic Abuse Protocol, significantly this now includes Forced Marriage which we have sadly needed to act upon in 2 recent cases. Our Synodal

Conversation group continued to meet regularly to explore the journey we started in 2022, its success seen in the establishment of the occasional in-person meeting alongside regular online gatherings; we are seeing its influence and effects gently permeating throughout the organisation. We explored the theme of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion at our in-person National Training Event for all members of the organisation in the autumn. Our 'Let's Talk About the Sacrament of Marriage' online winter event is leading to other training for our Marriage Preparation Facilitators to inform them of the tricky questions faced when sharing the Church's teachings in the context of today's world.

You may be wondering, but what about the role of women in all this? Throughout our 76-year history women have played an essential part in Marriage Care's establishment, growth, and success; they have never taken a back seat or played a secondary role. We pride ourselves in being one of the few places within the Church where women (or men) can follow their calling to work in Marriage & Family Life ministry without their partners or at times to break away from volunteering as a couple to work independently.

I will leave our latest (January 2024) figures to show the importance of women within Marriage Care and how without them we would have been unable to carry out much of our work in 2023:

Of the 375 people who regularly volunteer for Marriage Care 73% are women in a range of roles:

Volunteer Role	% Women	Volunteer Role	% Women
Board of Trustees	57	Marriage Prep Facilitators	72
Relationship Counsellors	88	Marriage Prep Trainers	69
Counselling Trainers	79	Centre Co-ordinators	54
Counselling Supervisors	84	Centre Support Staff	69

Of our permanent team of 12 paid staff (9.7 FTE) 92% are women with 3 of the 4 members of the Senior Leadership Team being female.

Fran Watson (Head of Marriage Preparation & Enrichment) - February 2024

Officers 2023/2024

President	Amy Cameron
Vice President	Jacintha Bowe
Past President	Margaret Clark
Treasurer	Barbara Cookson
Secretary	TBC
Legal Advisor	Nikki Petch

Members of the Executive Committee 2023/2024

Suzanne Kowal
Sophie Rudge
Dorothy Dodo
Abigail McMillan Co-opted

Convenors of Committees

Ecumenism : Jane Lavery
Interfaith : Patricia Stoa
Education: Jacintha Bowe
International : Maureen Meatcher
Science, Health, Bioethics : Mary McHugh
Social Responsibility: Rose Cartledge
Women in the Church : Helen Burgess
VAWG : Nikki Dhillon Keane

Diocesan Links 2023/2024

Arundel&Brighton Sue Petritz
Birmingham Angela Foster
Liverpool Pat Murphy
Hexham & Newcastle Amy Cameron
Middlesbrough Margaret Clark
Nottingham Helen Burgess
Plymouth Susanne Kowal
Salford Charlotte Hibbert
Southwark Susan Longhurst

Member Organisations 2023/2024

British Federation of Notre Dame Associations Diane Donovan

Catholic Association for Racial Justice Yogi Sutton- Nikki Petch
Catholic People's Weeks Brei Murtagh
The Grail [England] Christina Pilkington
Marriage Care Frances Watson
Newman Association Barbara Bolgiano
Society of the Holy Child Jesus Associates Sophie Rudge
Catholic Women's League Siobhan Garibaldi

Organisations where NBCW is a paying subscriber:

Andante Sophie Rudge

World Union of Catholic
Women's Organisations Maureen Meatcher

Organisations where NBCW has a representative

Catholic Union Patricia Stoaat
[Parliamentary & Public Affairs Committee]

Women's World Day of Prayer Margaret Clarke

Sweet love of earth surround you,
And may no harm confound you
Or break the peace within.

Saint Hilde's Blessing

Have peace with one another
As children of one mother,
Let each defer to other
And may your hearts be one.

Have peace with all around you;

Have peace with God your Maker
In Jesus be partaker
And Spirit, Consecrator,
God, three in one, grant peace.

The peace of God possess you;
The love of God caress you;
The grace of Heaven bless you
Peace everlastingly.