

Re-build Workers Exploited

Jim Consedine

There is an old 3 bedroom house in Addington in Christchurch which has 12 Filipino migrant workers staying in it at a cost of \$140 each per week. The total rent costs \$1720 per week. All are skilled carpenters with work experience spread over many years in such countries as Japan, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. All twelve are married men with wives and a total of nearly 30 dependent children at home. The 60 year old house has been expanded to add one sun room, a lounge and two extra tiny bedrooms. Before leaving for New Zealand, each of these migrant workers had to sign a contract in the Philippines with their employer to remain in the house for 23 months.

The exorbitant cost of rental housing in Christchurch and the unavailability of suitable work and pay for many migrant workers is exploitation of the highest order. It is theft on a rather large scale and appears to be systemic within parts of the rebuild culture in Christchurch. Of course, not all employers exploit their workers. But more than enough do so. They should be held to account.

The Rebuild

As the rebuild of Christchurch got under way two years ago, many migrant workers flooded the city seeking employment. They came from a variety of countries including Ireland, South Africa, England,



Scotland, Australia and the Philippines. All told, there is likely to be up to 20 000 migrant workers coming until the re-build is complete in about five years. The total rebuild cost is estimated to be \$40-\$50 billion.

Central to the re-build project are the roles of migrant workers. They are vital to it. It cannot succeed without them. Already, all around the city they are to be seen – building, painting, tiling, labouring, doing construction on roads and bridges, re-building the infrastructure, clearing and planting trees and gardens, driving lorries and cement trucks, fixing the wiring. There is no encouragement for these

workers to join unions, despite the advantages this would bring. In fact, many employers are distinctly anti-union.

The largest migrant workforce has come from the Philippines. They are much valued for their energy, their dedication, their work skills and their loyalty. Filipino culture is deeply religious. It is often marked by a deference to authority and a respect for elders. Unfortunately, this deference has led to many being exploited by some unscrupulous employers.

Exploitation Exposed

Rental prices in old houses of between \$900-\$1400 per week are not uncommon. *The Press* recently highlighted cases of up to 12 men sharing a house, each paying significant rent. The newspaper



focused on an organisation called World Changing, run by Phil Cooper, a former manager of Buildtech Holdings. World Changing owns 12 houses which it leases to the workforce of Buildtech Holdings at \$130-\$180 per week per person. Some houses have three workers to a room, though most don't. Three Buildtech houses visited were poorly maintained, cold, some with quake damage and big cracks in the walls. (*The Press*, 19 July 2014). Cooper sees no need for union involvement, as his organisation 'cares for all its workers needs' as he told a workers' meeting back in April.

In the TV3 television programme, *3rd Degree*, 16 July 2014, a variety of mainly Filipino migrant workers were interviewed on camera. They discussed their status as migrant workers in Christchurch, their conditions of work and pay and their living situations. Many of them were living in substandard housing, sometimes with four and up to six people to a room. Each were paying around \$150 per week for a bed, not a room. Sometimes their gear had to be stored in the same room in tiny cupboards or stashed away in a corner.

Who are we?

Members of Te Wairua Maranga Trust, which publishes this paper, have since 1989 been operating as a community following a Catholic Worker spirituality. We view the Treaty of Waitangi as our nation's founding covenant. We try, however inadequately at times, to live the Sermon on the Mount and its modern implications. We operate two houses of hospitality in Christchurch named after Suzanne Aubert and Thomas Merton. We offer hospitality to people in need either on a temporary or more permanent basis. We have a continuing outreach to a number of families offering friendship and support. We promote non-violence and a 'small is beautiful' approach to life, practise co-operative work and peace making, focus on issues of justice, support prison ministry, help create intentional communities, and try to practise voluntary poverty and personalism.

We engage in regular prayer and we also celebrate a liturgy every Wednesday at 6:00 pm at the Suzanne Aubert House, 8A Cotterill St, Addington, (off Poulson St, near Church Square), followed by a shared meal. Anyone is welcome – phone Francis, 338-7105.

We do not seek funding from traditional sources. We hope to receive enough to keep our houses of hospitality open and our various works going. Catholic Worker houses do not issue tax receipts since they are running neither a business nor a church social agency. We invite people to participate personally and unconditionally. Should you wish to make a regular contribution, you may do so through our Te Wairua Maranga Westpac Trust holding account (number 031703-0036346-02). Donations may also be made to **Te Wairua Maranga Trust, Box 33-135, Christchurch.** *The Common Good:* Editor: Jim Consedine - jim.conse@xtra.co.nz; Layout - Barbara Corcoran - burkespass@gmail.com

Many had paid up to 150,000 pesos (NZ\$4000) to a recruitment agency in the Philippines. They had to borrow that money at exorbitant rates from money lenders. The money lenders then held the debt over the heads of their families back home. Hence the need to repay urgently or their families faced the prospect of having to sell their homes and move out.

The company most under fire in the programme was Tech 5, which its spokesmen, John Wyatt and Brett Bothma, said had hired 117 workers so far from the Philippines to work in the re-build of Christchurch. They 'loaned' the workers up to US\$7700 (NZ\$10700) in order to travel to New Zealand and set them up with tools and equipment. But this money had to be repaid. This meant that money desperately needed to support families at home and repay money lenders was not available until the company's debt was met. It seems that Tech 5 has had first call on any subsequently wages that the workers accrue.

The directors were also confronted with the fact that the initial contract that workers signed before they left the Philippines was very general and lacking the specifics of the contract that they were asked to sign upon arrival in New Zealand. They replied that the contracts were currently under review.

Another company investigated was Moya Holdings, which had a staff of migrant workers numbering 14 workers. They too were charging \$150 per week for a bed, leaving the workers struggling to make ends meet.

Leigh's Construction, which employs many migrants, was also examined. Their managing director, Anthony Leigh, told *3rd Degree* that they sent their own personnel to the Philippines to recruit. They paid all the costs (upfront) of that process, flew the workers out and set them up in a company owned and managed accommodation near Oxford, as well as equipping them with tools for work. The cost of the tools has to be repaid out of their wages. If the worker does not complete their fixed-term contract they must pay recruitment costs incurred, including medical exam, visa, flights and the cost of sending Leigh's personnel to the Philippines to recruit.

The workers must live in the company-run accommodation for at least the first year of their employment. They each pay a rent of between \$150 - \$200 per week for shared rooms, which covers electricity, transport to and from work, and a chef to prepare meals. Food is an additional cost, around \$50 per week. Wages for skilled workers range from \$18 to \$25-30 per hour. This set-up is very similar to

the dormitory-type accommodation attached to so many factories in Asia, where workers are dependent on their employers for practically everything and are isolated through long hours of work, limited wages, no union representation and lack of transport options. These are conditions no Kiwi worker would tolerate. Why do foreign workers have to? Where is the Justice?

Justice for Workers

New Zealand has an enviable reputation as a country where people generally get a fair go in terms of employment and their living conditions. We hold and promote certain standards based on what is just and fair.

But there are plenty who don't. They take the dominant ideology of corporate capitalism, of self-first and foremost, to a point where their own humanity is compromised and the corrosive values of greed and exploitation take over damaging everyone they deal with. This is clearly being displayed too often by some employers in the Christchurch rebuild. They are undermining New

Zealand's reputation as a just and fair society.

Any decent Government should be on top of this type of rot and be in a position not only to monitor what is going on but deal to those who rip-off working migrants. Clearly these issues are of little interest to the current Government who basically believe 'the market' will take care of such issues. It doesn't. And it never will.

Pope Francis has been outspoken in his condemnation of corporate capitalism. He has many times warned that 'the market' left unregulated can never provide economic or social justice for all (see book review - *The Joy of the Gospel*, p 9). He's right, of course as all the evidence shows. But who is listening? Certainly not those employers who are thieving from their workers in Christchurch through high rentals and low wages and taking the food from the mouths of their families in the Philippines. They should be exposed and shamed.

Jim Consedine lives at the Thomas Merton CW and is the editor of The Common Good.

Editorial 1 Housing Rental Rort

We need to change the system. We need to overthrow, not the government, as the authorities are always accusing the Communists of conspiring to do, but this rotten, decadent, putrid, industrial, capitalist system which breeds such suffering.

Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage*, September 1956

The myth that somehow 'the market' balances out and provides fairness for the wider community is once again blown out of the water by the iniquitous housing rentals being charged in our major cities, particularly Christchurch and Auckland. Greedy landlords are primarily to blame. They are making a killing from the housing shortage at the expense of primarily low income people.

The Human Rights Commission has said that Cantabrian's human rights to habitable and affordable housing are being breached post-quake. It has called on the Government to 'sort out Christchurch's inadequate housing situation, which is falling below international standards. People's mental health is under increasing strain from being in emergency mode for so long, and their property woes did not help'. *The Press*, 30 July 2014

The recently released report from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), shows last year Christchurch's average weekly house rental was \$431 at the end of April, a 13% rise from the same time last year. Auckland was 4% higher, though the average income there was \$220 a week more.

This profiteering is immorality of the highest order. No Christian, who understands anything of the Gospel of Jesus, could engage in such practices in good conscience, given their impact on the poor. As the Human Rights Commission says, safe and comfortable housing is a basic human right, and sits along other rights such as the ability of access clean water, breathe unpolluted air, access to education and the opportunity to work. Surely in this modern sophisticated internet age, no one in their right minds could question such rights.

Unless – they accept that 'the free market' will decide. Let's be clear. The 'free market' is a myth, promoted by those who stand to gain from an unregulated economy. The market is not people and it is certainly not free. It consists of forces of economic power moving around banking systems, transnational corporations and speculative markets with the single aim of maximising profits for shareholders. It ignores the common good, that most fundamental of Church social teachings, which is the culmination of the Church's teachings on social justice. It has no boundaries and no moral basis in human society. Far from it being free, we are enslaved to it. Yet our corporate capitalist culture treats it like a god. A golden calf.

While the relatively few are grossly overpaid and recipients of great wealth, largely unearned, billions of people are enslaved to its provisions through unemployment, piecemeal work, sub-standard housing, lack of adequate food and clean water and through factory slave labour.

It is a sobering thought that both of our main political

parties, National and Labour, are wedded to this economic theory, National more so.

As Pope Francis so eloquently says, 'Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater economic justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the prevailing economic system...The worship of the ancient golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose.' *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, #54-55

In contrast, Catholic Worker philosophy offers a sane

Editorial 2 Nagasaki and Hiroshima Remembered

As we remember the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, let's also remember all those impacted by radiation as a result of nuclear testing and nuclear accidents. Earlier this year, I visited Fukushima city and the surrounding areas. The March 2011 triple disaster of the massive earthquake, tsunami and the explosions of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant killed almost 16 000 people.

Victims of Fukushima are now referred to as *hibakusha*, a term that was first used to describe people struck by the atomic bombings in Japan. The triple disaster has left 260 000 people still living in temporary housing settlements. Around 70 000 people will never be able to return home due to radioactive contamination. Hundreds and thousands more continue to live in areas with extremely dangerous levels of radiation and many people, including young children, carry Geiger-counters with them wherever they go.

Driving towards Fukushima city, our Geiger-counter alarm went off, alerting us that the levels were now dangerously high. The people I met there told me that many children now live totally indoors, and are never allowed to play outside because of the high levels of radiation. People are living with huge fear, wanting to take comfort from the reassurances that they are being given by government officials that they can safely live there, but also realizing that what they are being told isn't the truth. Thyroid cancer in children is very rare (usually between 1 to 3 children per million). But the Fukushima local Government confirmed in May this year that of the 170 000 children in the area, 50 children have developed thyroid cancer – which is something like 250 times what could be considered 'normal'. The family I stayed with in Sendai City - about one and a half hours drive from Fukushima - have two young girls aged 9 and 4. I heard two weeks ago that they have also been diagnosed with thyroid cysts.

As we met in a small church, two young men dressed in work overalls with gloves on were 'decontaminating' the back yard - scraping off top soil, and removing all the

and manageable way forward for those willing to embrace the Gospel more simply, more directly and more fully. Its focus is on Christ reflected in the dignity of each person, on pacifism and non-violence as a way of life, on intentional community-building, on recognising the inherent dignity of work and workers, on social justice and the common good. Its respect for creation and the need to preserve and enhance life on our planet, place CW spirituality and analysis directly within the mainstream of the social teachings of the Church. Its focus is also a recipe for a healthy lifestyle. Besides our own efforts, it trusts in the Providence of God to guide and sustain us and challenges us to live God's reign in our time.

—Jim Consedine

branches and leaves of the trees. They placed the contaminated material into large bags, but these sit stacked high across the region as the authorities don't know how to dispose of them.

In my meetings with local residents of Fukushima, they weren't particularly interested in talking about our earthquake. What they really wanted to know about was, how did New Zealand become nuclear free? I was reminded by how fortunate that Christchurch is - that we are nuclear free and didn't have any nuclear power plants to worry about during our earthquakes. The people in Fukushima were particularly interested in our local initiatives: the nuclear-weapons free zone stickers, declaring schools, streets, suburbs, indeed our whole city, nuclear free. Our actions provide real hope for them as they face their own struggle to have their voice heard, particularly in opposing the re-opening of the nuclear power plants in Japan. May we never take for granted our own nuclear-free history and the people who have worked tirelessly to ensure that we do have a country that continues to encourage and bring hope.

And let's ensure that other stories of hope are also told. In particular this year, we acknowledge the courage of the Marshall Islands which was the site of 67 nuclear tests. Earlier this year, they announced that they are suing the nine countries with nuclear weapons at the international court of justice at The Hague, arguing they have violated their legal obligation to disarm. The Marshall Islands argues it is justified in taking the action because of the harm it suffered as a result of the nuclear arms race.

May we remember all those who struggle each day due to the impact of radiation from the atomic bombs, from nuclear testing and nuclear accidents, and continue to stand in solidarity with them.

—Jill Hawkey

Jill Hawkey is a former director of Christian World Service, the development arm of the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Editorial 3 Mia Tay R.I.P.

We were saddened to learn of the death of Mia Tay in late June. Mia died of pancreatic cancer after a short illness. As Katie Dewes notes in her obituary (p10), Mia made an outstanding contribution to the peace movement in Christchurch over many decades. A prominent and lifetime member of the Society of Friends (Quakers), Mia always seemed to be present wherever social justice issues were being discussed or planned action was in

preparation. Just as her deep Christian faith was her foundation, so her own quiet presence always added strength to any gathering. Her insights and experience on matters of peace-making and justice made her a vital cog within the Quaker network nationally and in the peace movement, particularly around Christchurch. She will be hugely missed. May she rest in peace.

—Jim Consedine

Around the Traps

Mary Gallagher RIP - It is with sadness that we attended the funeral for **Mary Gallagher**, Kathleen's mother, in Sacred Heart Church, Addington, in mid-July. Mary had lived a very interesting and full life up until the end, and only succumbed in the last few days to her weakness. She had been out at the Canterbury Crusaders game the previous week. A faith-filled and valiant hearted woman to the end, Mary had insisted on attending Sunday Mass on the Sunday before she died. Members of the Catholic Worker joined Kathleen and her extended family and hundreds of others at the Vigil and later the Mass to farewell her in a wonderful celebration of her life and her faith. May she rest in peace.

Suzanne Aubert CW in Addington will be closed from the beginning of October through November for earthquake repairs. Francis will be staying with family. Hopefully, the repairs will not take that long and we will be back in harness again well before Christmas. During the repairs, our work in the community will continue as best possible. We are certainly not going away and will be back brighter than ever as we enter our 26th year with an upgraded house.

The US continues to spend about \$US12 billion a year in Iraq and Afghanistan and has already spent **\$US3.2 trillion** on these illegal and immoral invasions since 2003. Former Defense Secretary Donal Rumsfeld said the Pentagon cannot account for as much as \$US2.5 trillion in taxpayers money. Meanwhile, only \$US 0.15% of the US GNP goes towards assisting the 2 billion most needy people in the world.

- *War Resisters League*

Birthdays – Jim celebrated his 70th birthday with a gathering of family and friends (including Angelo), before embarking on an octave week of celebratory events. Members of the Catholic Worker joined him at Suzanne Aubert CW in early August and shared a luncheon and a musical jam. Some fine speeches were made from the floor of the house and great

enjoyment was had sharing stories. The previous day a large number from the Filipino community had met to enable Jim to thank them for their prayer and support for him and Maria while they were having their kidney operations. Fellow birthday travellers, veteran peace campaigner Rob Green, and Rex Knight, an old school friend and former parishioner, both 70, joined in Jim's celebrations, along with Sr Helen Goggin, who is responsible for the final scan of *The Common Good* before it goes to the printer. Helen was celebrating her 85th birthday and has been the final set of eyes on all 70 editions of *The Common Good*.

In early September, we joined in honouring two of our most ardent supporters, the prophet **Sr Pauline O'Regan**, who was 70 years professed as a Sister of Mercy, and **Sr Marie McCrea**, who celebrated 52 years with the Sisters. Both women have made significant contributions to the Mission of the Church in this country. It has been a privilege to have been supported and loved by them for so long. Incidentally, Pauline officially helped open Suzanne Aubert CW in Addington back in 1993. *Ad multos annos!*

Theresa Land, younger daughter of Catherine and Joseph Land, our CW family in the Hokianga, came and stayed a while en route for a job at Erewhon Station at the head of the Rangitata River in Mid-Canterbury. About the same time, **Margaret Ingram**, our only Israeli CW member, came to stay with Kathleen, co-incidentally at the same time as the Gaza massacre was taking place. They were disturbing times for all. It was lovely to host her and hear of the worries experienced by ordinary Israelis when their government goes to war.

As we go to press, we note the death of Wilfred (Will) Foote, imprisoned WWII conscientious objector and lifelong peace and justice activist. Will was 95. A full obituary will follow in our next edition.

Philippine Fair Trade Manager Assassinated

Shay Cullen SSC

Fair trade is all about working for justice, for the poor, the downtrodden, the impoverished and exploited people. It strives to lift them up to a life of dignity and greater opportunity in a non-violent, peaceful way through economic development. Fair Trade is a practical way to respect the rights and dignity of the poorest of the poor and to restore their human dignity. It does this by providing them with fairly paid jobs, social benefits, just wages and teaching them their human and economic rights. It is a Christian ideal in fact, not an ideological or political one. It is the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan in action as taught by Jesus of Nazareth.

That is how Romeo Capalla wanted to live his life. His brother joined the Catholic priesthood and became a well-liked bishop and served the people. But Romy, as he was fondly called, had his heart among the people. As he walked in the sugar cane fields and among the banana groves, he wondered how he could alleviate poverty in the poverty-stricken island of Panay, an island rich in agricultural products.

As elsewhere in the Philippines, all the land is owned by a few rich families with strong political connections. It was of course the great inequality between rich and poor that Pope Francis has roundly called a scandal to humanity, when a few own and control more than 70 percent of the national wealth.

Romy was a strong advocate of social justice and he was a pioneer in setting up and managing a Fair Trade marketing project called Panay Fair Trade Center (PFTC). The center helps the poor farmers and unemployed people organize small industries that export to the world shops that sell fairly traded products from around the world. They export banana chips and muscovado sugar.

Fair Trade in the Philippines is more than buying and selling products at fair prices. It is also working for human rights, helping the prisoners, the victims of sexual abuse, slavery, exploitation and land grabbing. It is about speaking out for justice and about human rights violations by dark forces.

Romy's advocacy and his skill in organizing economic groups caught the eye of the anti-insurgency military and police. These are elite units of the Philippine police and army. They have not defeated and wiped out the New People's Army since the communist insurgency began in 1972 and they are always in need of a success story, a victory to justify their continued access to funds, weapons and ammunition. Some of the rogue officers can get "victories" and promotions by falsely

accusing and arresting anybody without evidence as suspects and leaders of the rebel groups.

Romeo Robles Capalla, 65, was a soft target. He was a kind person, an inspiring speaker at international conferences and Fair Trade exhibitions in EU countries. A military unit arrested him in 2005 and charged him with subversion of being a rebel leader and taking part in the burning of a mining equipment but the court acquitted him. Unable to claim a "victory," they allegedly decided to kill him.

Last 15 March, they shot him down in front of his 90 year old mother-in-law in a bloody hail of bullets as evening fell near the Oton market. The evil deed was done metres away from the municipal hall and police station in the small town of Oton, 15 kilometers from the capital Iloilo City.

Romy is the 7th victim of such précised, military style executions this year. There are 169 documented victims killed in the same way in recent years: a pastor, priests, peasants, social workers and indigenous peoples protesting the land-grabbing of their ancestral domain. None of them were rebels shot like soldiers in a firefight. Most were killed by cowardly assassins riding in tandem on a motorbike as happened to Romy.

Why not confront the real rebels on the field of combat, one might ask? Catching the real rebels is a tough dangerous job and calls for courageous and brave soldiers to do that. It seems the soft targets are all the counterinsurgency unit can get. They get this "success" by branding human rights activists and social workers as subversive and accusing them of being communist sympathizers. We pray the assassins and their masters will be brought to justice.

It's appropriate to reflect on the frame up and false accusation hurled against Jesus of Nazareth. He was tortured and given a death penalty for his mission to bring about a new "Kingdom" of justice, love equality, sharing of land and property, service to the poor and repentance and forgiveness.

It was a holistic spiritual, social change and human rights activism all in one beautiful mission based on truth, justice and faith in a loving God. You could say, his radical challenge to the society, the elders and religious authorities brought about his arrest, torture, condemnation and death. Many of his true followers suffer the same.

Fr Shay Cullen is a Columban priest working these past 40 years with the poor in the Philippines, and a syndicated columnist worldwide.

Open Letter from Prison

Sister Megan Rice and Transform Now Ploughshares

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We send warm greetings and thanks to all who actively engage in the transformation of weapons of mass destruction to sustainable life-giving alternatives. Gregory Boertje-Obed, Michael Walli and I are sending you some of our observations and concerns on the second anniversary of our *Transform Now Ploughshares* action.

On 28 July 2012, after a thorough study of nuclear issues, and because of our deepening commitment to non-violence, we engaged in direct action by cutting through four fences at the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where the US continues to overhaul and upgrade thermonuclear warheads.

On that day two years ago, when we reached the building where all the US highly-enriched (bomb grade) uranium is stored, we prayed and also wrote messages on the wall, such as, 'The fruit of justice is peace'. We acted humbly as 'creative extremists for love', to cite one of our most important and revered leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr.

There are a number of reasons for what we did. We three were acutely mindful of the widespread loss to humanity that nuclear systems have already caused, and we realise that all life on earth could be exterminated through intentional, accidental or technical error.

Our action at the Y-12 site exposed the storage of weapons-making materials deliberately hidden from the public. The production, refurbishment, threat, or use of these weapons of mass destruction violate the fundamental rules and principles by which we all try to live amicably as human beings. The United States Constitution and the Laws of War are intended to ensure the survival of humanity with dignity. However, it is abundantly clear that harmony and co-operation among nations can never be achieved with nuclear weapons.

Our 'crime' was to draw attention to the criminality of the 70-year-old nuclear industry itself and to the unconscionable fact that the US spends more on nuclear weapons than on education, health, transportation, and disaster relief combined. We took action because we were acutely aware that our government has failed to keep its long-standing promise to pursue nuclear disarmament.

We citizens cannot permit ourselves to be rendered passive and mute by the banality of evil! Only complete nuclear disarmament can save humanity. Michael and Greg (six years) and I (three years) are in prison because, ironically, our action at Oak Ridge was based on the common sense reality that we human beings have endured more than enough destruction and exploitation. We believe that we citizens can exercise our collective power to consciously transform our nation's priorities.

We all need to actively insist on more humane uses for the billions of dollars now budgeted for the nuclear weapons/industrial complex.

Two years ago, as we neared the building at Oak Ridge, we were extremely surprised at the ineffectiveness of the system that supposedly guarded our nation's National Security Complex. We believed that we were about to expose the source of unfettered violence that has led to the chronic spiritual and economic decline in the US.

Most surprisingly, our July 2012 action and our court cases have revealed that it is not the US Government that is in control of the nuclear-weapons complex, but in reality it is the corporations that are in control through their solicitation and manipulation of endless funding of unlawful thermonuclear warheads. We three are incarcerated because we stood up to the nuclear weapons industry that is kept thriving by the interlocking and obsolete institutions that subscribe to the long discredited notion that law and security can be enforced by even-greater force.

Regarding the \$US22.8 billion dollar contract recently awarded for the operation of the Y-12 site at Oak Ridge and the Pantex site in Texas for the refurbishment of the thermonuclear warheads and new Uranium Processing Facility (UPF), the relevant corporations don't actually operate under the long discredited myth of 'nuclear deterrence.' Rather, corporations such as Babcock and Wilcox, Lockheed, and Bechtel operate under limited liability subsidiaries, joint ventures, consortiums, and partnerships for the main purpose of making profits by engaging in huge nuclear weapons production/refurbishment contracts. By this time, Congress certainly is aware that valid contracts can be issued only for the dismantlement of all nuclear weapons and for the environmentally-sound treatment and disposition of all nuclear materials.

In order for the US to negotiate for nuclear disarmament in good faith, we say it is essential to peacefully transform these very corporations so they are no longer able to violate the most basic moral and legal principles of civilised society by deliberately precipitating planetary self-destruction.

We thank you for your letters and support. We ask you to support the Republic of the Marshall Islands in their current legal action against the United States in the US Federal Court. If you are thinking of writing to Sr Megan, please do not include anything but the letter.

Greetings from Michael and Greg.

Blessings,

Megan Rice #92108 – 020

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Everyday prophets are in our midst

Thomas Gumbleton



In this article, we will explore and see what it means for Jesus and other prophets, and for us who are called through our Baptism, to be prophets. First of all, we ask ourselves what is a prophet? Sometimes, I suppose, we're caught up with the idea that a prophet is someone who predicts the future, who can foresee what is going to come in the future. That really isn't what we mean by a prophet, by those God calls to be prophets. It has nothing to do with predicting the future. A prophet is one who speaks on behalf of God.

That is what a prophet does. A prophet is called to be one who speaks as God speaks, bringing the message of God into our world, into the human family, into our lives. Clearly, that is what Jesus did.

Jesus comes into the midst of God's people, into the midst of the human family to be the Prophet who not only speaks on behalf of God, but whose very presence, whose very life, whose very being is a message about God, a message enabling us to know God deeply by knowing Jesus. He is the Prophet that is God. Now all of us are also called to be prophets, and we must understand as Ezekiel did, that people may not listen. They may reject the prophet. Surely, that's what we see happening in Nazareth.

The people couldn't take Jesus as a Prophet. They were happy to see Him do some healing, and they thought of Him as a wonder worker, but for Him to speak on behalf of God, who is He? He's a carpenter. They spoke in a very derogatory way about Jesus. "We know His family. They're nobody. Why is He putting Himself up?" So they reject Him. Jesus, as Mark says, is astounded at the hardness of their hearts, and because they are not able to be open to Him, open to God, God's love can't touch them. So Jesus decides to leave there, but a Prophet has been in their midst as God promised.

As we look at the world around us and not only in the past, but in the present, too, we know that there have been many prophets whom God has sent. I suggest a couple that we're probably very familiar with. I think everyone knows Mother Teresa. She was a prophet, not so much by what she said. She didn't go around preaching, but her very life exemplified God's love that

includes everybody, especially the poor, the rejected, those that are thrust aside almost as worthless. She went among them. She brought healing -- not so much physical healing.

She did that by bringing the Sisters into their midst and bringing that healing love of God, but her very life spoke God's love for God's people, that our God is a God of love who reaches out to all of us, but especially to the poor, the most rejected. That's a powerful message about God that Mother Teresa preached by her very life.

I also bring to your attention another woman prophet: Dorothy Day. She is not as well known as Mother Teresa, but one who has had a significant impact on the Church, especially in our country. Some people would claim that Dorothy Day has been, in the history of the Church in the United States, the most outstanding of prophets. She started an organization or community, the Catholic Worker Community, people who live the radical teachings of the Gospel, who go among the poor and live among them, welcoming the poor into their homes through houses of hospitality, and who try to transform our world into the Reign of God by bringing the message of Jesus into our world.

One of the things that Dorothy Day did that was not well known, during the Second Vatican Council, when the Bishops at the Council were discussing the part of the document on the Church in the modern world about war and peace, she together with some others, met with a number of bishops and helped to influence their thinking about the need to issue a declaration condemning weapons of mass destruction. It's the only place in all of the Vatican Council, in the document *The Church in the Modern World*, where there is a condemnation of weapons of mass destruction as being something totally evil that never could be justified.

That was prophecy, a God message proclaimed through the help of Dorothy Day and the others who were with her, but now through the bishops of the world teaching, prophesying, speaking on behalf of God, giving us this message that we must turn away from war, and especially wars that bring about the destruction of innocent human lives. We must turn away from that. It's a powerful message. I think that here, too, we discover for the most part we haven't really been listening: not enough to Mother Teresa and not enough to Dorothy Day and the bishops of Vatican II.

We still find ourselves in a world where there are a vast majority of poor people who are neglected and pushed aside and ignored. In our own country, it's getting to be a larger and larger number, while a few are getting richer and richer. We find ourselves embroiled in acts of violence and war, and the use of weapons that kill so many innocent people. So prophecy is still something that God is using. God is speaking to us through

prophets, but like the people in Nazareth, like the people in exile in Babylonia, we do not listen well enough.

That is one of the things that we must reflect on today as we are instructed on prophets and prophecy, and our role as baptized members of the Body of Christ, to be a prophet as He. We must listen and reflect on do we listen? Are we really trying to hear God's Word proclaimed by the prophets who are in our midst today, those who in some special way are proclaiming God's word and the radical teachings of Jesus? Are we listening? Then, also, are we being the prophets we're called to be?

Most of us would not think of ourselves as going out and preaching, proclaiming God's Word from the

housetops, so to speak, but we can do it in the way Mother Teresa did it: through our lives. We can be what we might call everyday prophets.

So today, we must ask ourselves, are we going to leave this Church and understand more clearly that we are called to be a prophet, to follow Jesus the Prophet? We must pray that God will give us the ability to proclaim God's Word wherever we are, not necessarily and most often not in words, but just to proclaim God's way of love by the way we live out the Word of God.

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton is a retired auxiliary US bishop and a founder of Pax Christi.

Book Review

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel*, St Paul's Publications, Sydney, November 2013, 206 pages, \$17-50, plus p/p. Reviewer: Jim Consedine.

This may well be a first for the Catholic Worker. To review a Pope's Apostolic Exhortation is pretty unusual. But this one, written by Pope Francis to mark the end of the Year of Faith, demands a response one year on, lest it disappear onto dusty bookshelves never to surface again.

For an official Church document, it is a stunner! I recently re-read it and found myself enthused all over again for its content and its style. In it, Francis focuses on the essential components of the Good News we are supposed to live daily. As the title suggests, he has built his presentation around the theme of the joy that truly living the Gospel brings. And he has made it exciting reading, even though most of us have heard sentiments like these thousands of times before.

His simplicity of approach to the joy in the Gospel can give to those who seek it, is contagious. You just know this man believes every word he writes. Yet he leads himself and us towards an openness to the Holy Spirit to further enlighten through fresh insights and the reading of 'the signs of the times', which he invokes as an essential part of understanding where and how God is operating in our world. While drawing on the best of the past, he constantly issues new challenges to recognise we do not live in a static Church dominated by history but a constantly evolving body of believers with the Holy Spirit at the hub of the movement.

He challenges us all to be missionaries in the sense of outreach through our way of living and the service we show our neighbour. He keeps his harshest words for those who benefit from the corporate capitalist system of economic exploitation which plagues the world today and leads to so much inequality and injustice. #53-60. No Pope in history has been so clear as to what is wrong and who is primarily responsible. And no one has presented the facts in a more readable way. Drawing on his predecessor Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), he quotes 'the Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.'

Our local parish recently purchased 60 copies and revisited the Pope's letter. People were encouraged to read/study a section at a time, preferably with a neighbour, spouse or friend, reading it out loud and highlighting key passages enabling them to return quickly for a particularly memorable quote. This was based on the premise that it contains enough fuel for the personal Pentecost fires to last for a decade or more. That's what I call a recommendation!

Film Review

***Aunty and the Star People*, Director/Screenplay/Photography – Gerard Smyth. Running time – 82 minutes. General release in NZ - September 2014. Reviewer: Jim Consedine.**

I went to this film at the recent festival and came away deeply moved. It is the story of one of New Zealand's unsung heroines, Jean Watson, who, after having a lengthy relationship and two children with author Barry Crump in New Zealand, left at the age of 50 to travel to India. There she established a home for orphans, taking in a few to begin, but expanding with the passing of time. To finance her dream, she sold her Wellington home and used the money to build her orphanage. Today, it is well established.

Christchurch filmmaker, Gerard Smyth, takes his camera and follows Jean, now aged 80, on one of her many visits back to India to film her at work. He presents a stunning portrayal of a woman, with vision, resourcefulness and heaps of compassion, showing how one person's dream can become reality. We follow her along dusty roads, into her school classrooms, into the dormitories where the pupils all live. There she is called 'aunty' and she calls the children 'star people', named for the white stars painted on their faces.

I must say I was surprised I had never heard of Jean's work before, despite the fact it places her among our most valuable exports to India. At one stage, when she made a dismissive comment about being called a saint, I

was reminded of Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker, who used to fend off that charge by saying ‘you can’t get rid of me that easily’. Jean says much the same thing. Her humility runs deep. For her, this work is just what you do – you see the need and get on with it.

Gerard Smyth is to be congratulated for this effort, another triumph following his Christchurch earthquake documentary, *When a City Falls*. As it is on general release, if you get a chance see it at your local cinema. You will love it.

Obituary Mia Tay (1941-2014)



Mia Tay died from cancer 25 June 2014 in Christchurch, aged 73. For more than 40 years, she was very active in the peace movement, both locally and nationally. Mia emigrated to New Zealand from Holland after a World War II,

and joined the Society of Friends and became a Quaker after attending the Quaker School in Whanganui. She protested against the Vietnam War, and in 1975 became the part-time organiser for the Christchurch Peace Office. In 1979, Mia was a founding member of the Christchurch Peace Collective, while in 1981 she help found the Christchurch Peace Forum and in 1982 Women for Peace.

In the early 1980s she helped re-activate a dormant Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and build a Christchurch branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. She also helped organise

the first Peace Movement NZ meeting at Living Springs and later served on the Peace Movement Aotearoa working group and the New Zealand Peace Foundation Council. Mia helped run the Environment Peace Information (EPI) Centre in the Arts Centre, and was the Christchurch representative on the National Consultative Committee on Disarmament for many years. The Quaker peace and service work was a particular passion for her.

In 1976, Mia also established and organised the annual lantern ceremony marking the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She helped sew beautiful rainbow banners celebrating Christchurch as the first nuclear free city in 1982 and New Zealand’s nuclear free status. She also helped draft the Christchurch Peace City proposal which was adopted in 2002. In 2005, Mia received a Peace City Award in recognition of her lifetime commitment to peace making. After a life of hard work and advocacy for others, may she now be fully at peace herself.

—Kate Dewes

Karl Rahner – Experiencing God

Karl Rahner, arguable the 20th century’s greatest theologian, asserts that to speak of the human is to speak of the divine and vice versa.

He describes God as the mystery in human experience. For him, then, God is the depth dimension in experiences such as solitude, friendship, community, death, hope and, as such, is the orientation towards the future.

Rahner goes so far as to say that loneliness, disappointments and the ingratitude of others, can be graced moments because they open us to the transcendent.

The silence of God, the toughness of life, the darkness of death can be graced events.

This mystery of grace discloses itself as a forgiving nearness, a hidden closeness, our home, a love which shares itself, something familiar which we can turn to from the alienation of our own empty and perilous lives.

When we are in touch with ourselves authentically, we experience God.

Annice Callaghan RSCJ, *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*.

Letters

10 Kahurangi Heights,
Aotea

Dear Jim,

Thank you so much for *The Common Good*. As usual I learnt all sorts of things I didn't know about, presumably, things the 'powers that be' don't want me to know. I am continually challenged by the sacrificial lives that so many unknown (to me anyway) brave men and women live in their efforts to see justice done. It all seems overwhelming – the stuff that is going on out there in our country – that one feels somewhat paralysed about what to do. Glad I am back on the mailing list and look forward to the next one.

God bless,

Helen Stevenson.

40 Perth Street,
Invercargill 9810

Dear Jim,

Greetings and hope you are in full recovery.

Things going well here. Sunday lunch is going well. There are a number of volunteers who come simply to help with the washing up and serving the tables. Extra food, soup and desert is also brought. Of course, Bill Butler is the cook and that usually means sausages on buttered bread and tomato sauce. Bill reckons he has been doing this for 14 years. That is every Sunday practically all that time.

After lunch we have a prayer group. Not many stay for it. They are joined by the people who serve. Pray that we will attract more to stay behind and join us. There is a short prayer and hymn plus Gospel. There is always a good response and singing. Finally a word from Mother Teresa. 'What will save the world?' My answer is prayer. God bless and keep you.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Tom Keyes.

Dorothy Day CW,
Washington DC

Hi Jim,

Pentecost greetings of peace to you! Thank you so much for your heartfelt words! Deeply grateful.

We continue to keep at it here in the imperial city, doing the works of mercy and peace and resistance. Just back for the early Monday morning peace vigil that we do at the Pentagon each Monday. We continue to offer hospitality to five formerly homeless families. My wife and I have a seven year old who is thriving at an excellent Christian Family Montessori school. Never a dull moment with family and community!

Please extend my greetings and a hug to Moana Cole. And keep up the great work there! And many thanks for your fine newsletter. Thank you for all you are doing to live and proclaim the reign of God! We continue to keep our eyes on the prize for Christ is Risen!!!

A hug of gratitude,

Art Laffin

10 Orangi Kaupapa Road
Wellington 6014

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Common Good is available at our church in Wellington. I often take it to read; and I am encouraged by your philosophy and practice. Enclosed is a cheque to support your work and long may it continue.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Kerr

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The Common Good

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 Christchurch 8244
 New Zealand



We've had enough of exhortations to be silent. Cry out with a thousand tongues. I see the world is rotten because of silence.

—*Catherine of Sienna, Doctor of the Church, 1347 - 1380*