



Church of Sanctuary and Churches' Refugee Network Conference at The Church at Carrs Lane, Birmingham, B4 7SX on 8 June 2024

Conference Report

Background

The Church of Sanctuary and Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) conference, which was hosted by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), brought together churches, parachurch groups and organisations working with asylum seekers, refugees, and those who provide some form of 'hospitality' or 'sanctuary' to those in need.

Events on the day

The full programme for Saturday 8 June 2024 can be found in the 'Appendices' (See Appendix 1).

Morning session

The day itself saw around 130 delegates attend from Ireland, Wales and England for what was an 'in-person' event held at the Church at Carrs Lane, Birmingham, B4 7SX (See Appendix 2).

The conference was a joint venture between CTBI, Church of Sanctuary, City of Sanctuary and the CRN. The conference was also the national (England) Church of Sanctuary conference. The day showcased the excellent work taking place in Birmingham, the West Midlands, and further afield to resolve many of the issues impacting people seeking asylum and refuge. (See Appendix 3 for a selection of photographs.)

Bishop John Perumbalath, the CRN's Chair had earlier offered his apologies. On the day, Richard Reddie, the CRN's coordinator, carried out 'housekeeping and general information' before handing over to **Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal**, the head of Church of Sanctuary (COS) and the conference host. Inderjit welcomed attendees to the conference and spoke about the aims and objectives of the day. He then invited **Shari Brown** from Birmingham City of Sanctuary to offer greetings and speak about their work locally and nationally. (City of Sanctuary was one of the conference partners.)

Bishop Mike Royal, the conference Chair for the first part of the event, took over proceedings. Bishop Mike added a welcome and spoke about the significance of the conference, given what was taking place on these shores regarding asylum and immigration.

Keynote speakers

Bishop Mike then introduced **Prof. Robert Beckford**, a leading academic, theologian, writer and filmmaker, who was the first keynote speaker. Robert used PowerPoint to highlight the experiences of the Windrush generation of Caribbean people (from 1948 onwards) and juxtaposed this with the lack of hospitality and welcome that those folks experienced in Britain. He then spoke about current attitudes to asylum seekers and refugees on these islands. He noted the current hostile environment and the rise of right-wing, populist nationalist politicians and opinion-formers in Britain, Ireland and Europe. He offered attendees a plan of action that the churches and Christians needed to take in order to address the current situation.

After this presentation, **Dr Jayme Reaves** also used PowerPoint to provide attendees with a theological understanding of sanctuary, exploring what the Bible has to say on the matter. She noted that the Abrahamic faiths all have much to say about sanctuary and hospitality. She then explored what hospitality and sanctuary should mean in our current situation.

Q&A

Bishop Mike then led a Q&A session involving Robert and Jayme, who responded to questions from the Chair and a number of people in the audience. They dealt with questions relating to their presentations and matters linked to asylum and refugees.

After the Q&A, Bishop Mike provided information about the workshops that were to follow. (On registration, all attendees were assigned to a morning and afternoon workshop. See *Appendix 1* for more information about the four workshops.)

Lunch

During lunch, participants had an opportunity to visit the marketplace where a number of organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers had tables that showcased examples of their work.

Afternoon session

Dr Nicola Brady, CTBI's General Secretary, was the afternoon's host, and welcomed back participants, and highlighted what would be taking place in that session. She spoke about CTBI and the CRN's work, before handing over to **Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin**, the afternoon's Chair.

Keynote speakers

Bishop Rose introduced **Vanessa Baker**, Assistant Head at St Dunstan's Primary School, in Birmingham, who spoke about her students, and how they have taken a keen interest in social justice issues, especially asylum and immigration matters. She noted how the students have been informed by Catholic social justice teachings and are passionate about standing up and alongside some of the most marginalised and oppressed groups in the country.

Vanessa's presentation was followed by two testimonies from personnel linked to **Stories of Hope and Home**, a local organisation who are based at Carrs Lane Church. The group provides safe spaces for people with experience of seeking sanctuary to build community, share stories and experiences, and to engage in creative activities. The two spoke about their journeys to

Britain, describing the reasons why they were forced to leave their homelands. They also recounted the challenges that they faced in this country as asylum seekers, especially the way the hostile environment undermined their efforts to make a new life.

Q&A

Dr Nicola Brady then chaired the second Q&A involving Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, Richard Reddie and the two personnel from 'Stories of Hope and Home'.

Final words

Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin wrapped up proceedings by speaking about her work in Dover and the county of Kent, which has become a flashpoint for immigration/asylum matters. She noted the hostility she had faced over her stance on this issue, especially from those who called themselves Christians. She mentioned how a visit to France had given her a firsthand opportunity to see how those seeking asylum live, and the way they are treated by the French authorities. Bishop Rose also spoke about the importance of the Church being prophetic on these matters, and how this required bravery and courage to stand up for what is right.

Bishop Rose ended the conference by reciting the Franciscan Blessing 'of discomfort'.

Appendix 1 - Conference Programme

Time	Time	Activity	Personnel
10:15	11:00	Arrivals – coffee, tea and biscuits will be available. Singing – to set the mood	St Dunstan's Schools Choir
11:00	11:15	Welcome and setting the scene.	Introduction by host , Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal Then Chair in the morning – Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary of CTE, to take over
11:15	11:35	First Keynote speaker	Prof. Robert Beckford
11:35	11:55	Second Keynote speaker	Dr Jayme R. Reaves
11:55	12:00	Instructions from Chair	Bishop Mike Royal
12:00	12:20	Question and Answers	Keynote speakers: Bishop Mike Royal to facilitate
12:20	12:30	Instruction about workshops: Delegates to make their way to their workshops	Bishop Mike Royal
12:30	13:15	Workshops: 1. How to become a Church of Sanctuary In the main sanctuary 2. Advocacy and political voice In the Bertha Wright Room – 1st Floor 3. Church-related work taking place locally In the Margaret Rowland Room – 1st Floor 4. Asylum Voices. In the Lounge – Lower Ground Floor	Workshop leaders/facilitators Inderjit Bhogal followed by a Church of Sanctuary from Lichfield, and also Gerard Goshawk speaking about Six Ways Baptist Church. This workshop will be led by QARN (Quakers Asylum and Refugee Network) This session will be led by Fatima House and Restore. Led by 'Stories of Hope and Home' who are based at Carrs Lane
13:15	14:00	Lunch	Change Kitchen to provide lunch
14:00	14:15	Welcome back	Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary for CTBI to welcome people back, talk about CTBI, and to introduce the Chair in the afternoon, Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover.
14:15	14:30	Third keynote speaker	Vanessa Baker, Assistant Head at St Dunstan's Primary School, in Birmingham.
14:30	14:45	Fourth keynote speakers	'Stories of Hope and Home'
14:45	15:00	Instructions about the workshops Attendees to depart for workshop	Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin
15:00	15:45	Workshops: Delegates to attend workshops. These will be a re-run of the earlier ones.	Workshop facilitators – as per the previous session
15:45	15:50	Attendees make their way back	All
15:50	16:10	Question and Answers	Keynote speakers in the afternoon: Dr Nicola Brady to facilitate
16:10	16:30	Final words from the chair	Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin
16:30	Ends	Coffee, teas and biscuits on departure	

Appendix 2 - Participants

Prof Robert Beckford



Bloomsbury 2022).

Prof. Robert Beckford joined the University of Winchester in 2021 as the Director of the Institute for Climate and Social Justice. Robert is an activist scholar, working inter-disciplinarily to address, confront and overturn injustice in African mainland and diaspora communities. Robert's scholarship takes place across a range of media. He has written eight monographs exploring the interface of religion, ethnicity, and social justice. His most recent work is an action-research project on decoloniality, music and theology (*Decolonising Gospel Music: A Revolutionary Theopraxis*, Bloomsbury 2022).

Robert is a BAFTA Award-winning documentary filmmaker. His films have contributed to increasing public awareness of issues of corporate malfeasance in Africa, the reparations movement and anti-racism in Britain. Robert's most recent media projects are an independent film project funded by the Movement for Justice and Reconciliation (50k), exploring the meaning of reconciliation in response to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade ('After Noah: Christianity, Slavery and Reconciliation 2022'). Also, a BBC World Service documentary on the environmental impact of colonialism on Barbados (2022).

Robert is currently involved in a range of Research and Knowledge Exchange projects, including a hip-hop/rap music-inspired sustainability resource for Key Stage 1 Geography and a series of religious icons titled 'Our Lady of Climate Justice.'

Dr Jayme R. Reaves



Dr Jayme R. Reaves is Director of Academic Development at Sarum College. She is a public theologian with specific interests in feminist and liberation methods, and has a keen interest in helping congregations, organisations, communities and individuals to reflect on both, developing theologies on specific public issues such as race, gender, economics, and immigration. However, she is also interested in helping people learn to think more deeply about theology's public impact by considering what we believe and how we talk about theology and religion in ways that shape and influence culture, both for good and for ill.

Her book *Safeguarding the Stranger: An Abrahamic Theology and Ethic of Protective Hospitality* looks at the theology and ethic of providing sanctuary or refuge to those who are under threat, and how the Western Christian theology and practices of hospitality can be enriched by the recovery of honour and etiquettes related to hospitality as seen in the Jewish and Islamic traditions.

The majority of her work explores socially-engaged biblical studies and considering the various theological and social legacies created by social injustice, violence, peace, reconciliation and moral courage, with interests in both non-violent resistance and non-confessional and interfaith theological and ethical constructions and practice. Over the last 20 years, she has worked as a consultant, researcher, facilitator, and lecturer in the United States, Bosnia, Croatia, Great Britain, and Northern Ireland.

Bishop Mike Royal – General Secretary -Churches Together in England



Bishop Mike Royal is the general secretary of Churches Together in England. He is a Pentecostal Bishop with the Apostolic Pastoral Congress.

Bishop Mike is a social justice advocate and was previously the co-chief executive of The Cinnamon Network, and is a founding trustee and former national

director of Transforming Lives for Good (TLG).

The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin is the Bishop of Dover and the Bishop in Canterbury

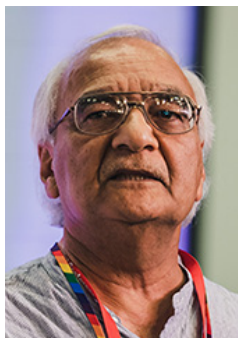


Bishop Rose was born and raised in Jamaica, and was educated at Montego Bay High School for Girls and later at Birmingham University. She trained with the Church Army and was commissioned in 1982 as an Evangelist; she later trained for ordination at Queens Theological College on their part-time course, ordained deacon in 1991, priested in 1994 and served her title at St Matthew's Church, Willenhall Road in the Diocese of Lichfield. For sixteen and a half years she served as a priest in Hackney (Holy Trinity with St Philip, Dalston and All Saints, Haggerston). In 2007 she was appointed as a Chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen and in 2010, she became the first female

appointed to the position of the 79th Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons. In November 2014, she took on the additional responsibility as Priest in Charge of city church, St Mary-at-Hill near Monument.

She has previously served as a member of the General Synod of the Church of England and also as one of the Panel of Chairs of the Synod. She has twice represented the Church of England at the World Council of Churches (in Zimbabwe & Brazil); she served as its priest representative on the Anglican Consultative Council for 9 years. She also served as a Selection Secretary for the Church of England, helping to select men and women seeking to test their vocation to the ministry.

Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal – Lead – Church of Sanctuary



Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal OBE is a leading theologian and Methodist Minister. He is founder and President of City of Sanctuary, a former President of the Methodist Conference, and the former Leader/CEO of the Corrymeela Community.

His work in interfaith relations was recognised with an OBE in the 2005 New Year's Honours List. Inderjit was also the recipient of the 2018 World Methodist Peace Award.

Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



Dr Nicola Brady is the General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. She was formerly the General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, and Joint Secretary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. Dr Brady has experience in faith-based peace-building both in Ireland and internationally, her work having included human-rights advocacy, support to victims and survivors, community engagement with policing, and research and publications.

She is a Director of Christian Aid Ireland and of the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation.

Richard Reddie – Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



Richard is the Director of Justice and Inclusion at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

He is a writer, researcher, cultural and religious commentator and broadcaster. He is the author of three books, and the editor of the publication, *Race for Justice* (Lion/SPCK – 2022).

Vanessa Baker - St Dunstan's Primary School – Birmingham



Vanessa Baker (on the right), is the Assistant Head Teacher at St Dunstan's Catholic Primary School, a school in the heart of vibrant Kings Heath. St Dunstan's has been a School of Sanctuary since December 2021 and is something of which the school and community is very proud. At the core of its values, is to live out the Gospel values of loving one another, as Jesus loved us.

This for the school, includes welcoming the stranger, which it teaches its pupils is what Jesus teaches them to do. All the pupils believe that they are builders of a new humanity, one where everyone is treated as an equal, and this has been down to the Catholic Social Teachings and its School of Sanctuary Journey.

Jasmine Cullen – Restore



Jasmine Cullen is Restore's Befriending Co-ordinator. Jasmine matches refugees and asylum seekers with trained volunteer befrienders and supports a team of over 100 volunteers. Befriending is a mutually beneficial service that helps refugees settle into their new community and helps volunteers to understand more about the cultures of those moving into Birmingham. Befriending involves providing welcome and time to practice conversational English, as well as sharing information on relevant services, college courses or volunteering opportunities. The main benefits are relationships across cultures, reduced social isolation, improved confidence with both English and navigating life in the UK and better mental health and wellbeing. Each befriending match is unique. One refugee described the impact as follows, "In the country I fled, so many people were trying to break me down. Through Restore and befriending I have learnt the beauty of being built up. This was new to me."

Restore is a project of Birmingham Churches Together responding to the call of Jesus to welcome the stranger. Restore's vision is for a society into which all refugees and asylum seekers are welcomed, valued and integrated. Restore works towards that vision through building relationships and equipping for integration, motivating for action and working for change. Restore's relational services are one-to-one befriending and group social activities.

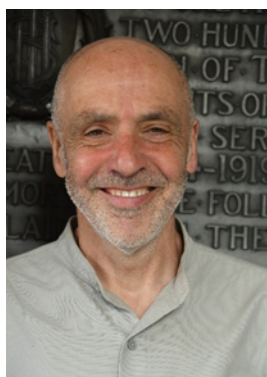
James Trewby - Fatima House



James Trewby is the Columban's Justice, Peace and Ecology (JPE) Co-ordinator and Education Worker. In this role he helps young people and educators explore the relationship between faith and action, where possible through experience and encounter; "A life unlike your own can be your teacher" (St Columban).

James is a qualified teacher with an MSc in 'Education and Training for Development' and a PhD exploring life stories of activist educators. He has volunteered and worked for the Salesians and the Columbans and has varied experiences of community life, prayer, supporting volunteers, social action and activism. None of this adequately prepared him for having two small children.

Revd Gerard Goshawk



Rev Gerard Goshawk is pastor at Six Ways Erdington Baptist Church in North Birmingham, the first Church of Sanctuary in the UK. He is also chair of trustees of Erdington Foodbank and very much active ecumenically. And within the Baptist Union of Great Britain, he has been at the forefront of working for racial justice.

QARN



The Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) was established in 2006 with the aims of supporting those who also provide provision for asylum-seekers and refugees, as well as ensuring that Quakers across the country are kept up-to-date with developments. It believes that a principled critique of current asylum policy should be part of its corporate Quaker witness, in keeping with its 'Testimony to Equality'.

For almost 20 years it has held meetings and workshops, produced leaflets and written articles, organised conferences and online courses, and has regularly contributed to parliamentary inquiries. Its current priorities (as well as the ongoing tightening of the asylum system) are visa fees, detention, the outsourcing of government work, and housing and accommodation. It has a small steering group and holds open meetings four times a year.

Stories of Hope and Home



Stories of Hope and Home is a small Birmingham-based charity with dual complementary aims. Firstly, to provide a safe space for people with experience of seeking sanctuary to build community, to share stories and experiences, and to engage in creative activities. Its sessions involve conversations, creative writing and many cups of tea! It has, among other things, written a poetry book and co-created a performance with the Welsh National Opera. Its participants come from all across the world, with people of different genders, ages, cultures and faiths: and yet describes itself as 'one family'. And secondly, to facilitate encounters which take their stories to others, particularly but not exclusively in schools.

Not everyone who has sought sanctuary wants to share their personal story, but for those who do, helping them to find their voice and the confidence and opportunity to do so is mutually beneficial for both speakers and listeners. No-one tells the story of seeking sanctuary better and more powerfully than those for whom it is their lived experience. It deeply believes in the power of personal encounter to transform understanding, to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, to develop empathy and compassion, and to inspire action.

ChangeKitchen CIC



ChangeKitchen CIC, has dedicated over 13 years to serving colourful, tasty climate-conscious food for all, to Birmingham and beyond, with their credentials winning them the Birmingham Green Restaurant award.

Their team of diverse staff and volunteers deliver incredible, memorable weddings, birthdays, office lunches and more, as well as cooking up meals for the community using surplus ingredients. With a wide-ranging selection of well-loved dishes from around the world to sample from, as well as proudly catering for dietary needs and allergies, they are well placed to deliver on their ethos of bringing everyone around one table of colourful, exciting dishes.

All their food is made with local ingredients wherever possible, from golden rapeseed oil from the Cotswolds to free-range eggs from nearby, high welfare farms. And they do all of this while supporting those furthest from the labour market back into work. They believe passionately that this makes a difference not only to our food, but to the world.

Appendix 3 - A selection of photographs from the conference





