



Movement of Christian Workers

# REVIEW

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## Truth of Experience

Where do you start? Well, as famously sang in *The Sound of Music*, “Let’s start at the very beginning, a very good place to start ..”. For us that starting point is our lives! Joseph Cardijn, the founder of the Young Christian Workers believed in the importance of young workers starting with their lived experiences so as to bring to the fore the contradictions between their lives and their human dignity, their self-worth. The MCW follows this same path in reviewing our own lives and that of others. José A. Pagola<sup>1</sup> notes how Jesus’ language was unique. Referring to the parables he writes ‘There is nothing artificial or forced in his words; everything is clear and simple. He talked about life... all Galilee is present in his language; its work days and feast days, its sky and seasons, its flocks and vineyards, its planning and harvesting, its beautiful lakes and its population of fishermen and farmers.’ We would add women looking after the homes, fetching and carrying, coping as widows with little, if any income or trying to seek justice; all showing determination to live their lives as best they could whilst breaking the mould that their expected roles imposed. In this edition of our Review all articles and items take on the same starting point; the reality of workers’ lives and that of others.

The ‘Pandemic through our Eyes’ is an update of the previous version from July 2020. Written at the request of the ACO Movement, Spain it reflects Reviews of Life and enquiry material from members up to April 2021. The depth and breadth of poverty, before and after the pandemic, is exposed by the rise of food bank demands as noted by the Trussell Trust; a demand likely to rise with the ending of the furlough scheme and the £20.00 universal credit top-up. Also, Pope Francis’ address to the International Labour Organisation illustrates how, comprehending and appreciating the diversity of workers’ realities throughout the world needs to be the starting point for action at all political and economic levels. Whilst the surge of poverty is more widely recognised some issues may still remain hidden. The increase in the use of credit or debit card transactions during the pandemic can be detrimental to others. Why? Because, of the decrease in ‘free-to-use’ ATM machines. Again, it is more likely to be those with little cash reserves and/or older people who depend on the availability of access to cash in hand for budgeting or out of habit.

Pat Jones and Paul Edwards feature in this Review both instigated by the lived experience of one of their parents. Paul’s father, a merchant seafarer, was a member of the Apostleship of the Sea<sup>2</sup>. Paul reviews a book giving a personal testimony of a retired chaplain. The work of these chaplains is provoked through identifying a need because of the realities that are faced but well hidden. The experience of Pat Jones’ mother has triggered a unique research project examining the experience of women who joined the YCW in the 1950-1970s. She is seeking women who would be willing to look back at their experiences and reflect on them with her. It is the Truth of Experience that provokes us to see things anew: To question more deeply our own experience and that of others acts to highlight the disparity between realities and our belief in the Truth of Faith.

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<sup>1</sup> (Jesus. An Historical approximation) PRE (Pastoral Renewal Exchange) 159 November 2020, Page 16

<sup>2</sup> Now known as Stella Maris

# LA PANDEMIA A TRAVÉS DE NUESTROS OJOS

By Josephine Dearlove, MCW Inglaterra

This is the English version of an article written especially for Salillum de l'ACO. Salillum is the publication of the ACO Movement, Spain.



## The Pandemic through out Eyes

< MCW members attending a zoom seminar

Our Reviews of Life illuminated how the implications and

consequences of the pandemic effects people in a variety of different ways. Experience depends so much on; living conditions, job roles and employment sector, ethnicity, health (physical & mental) as well as the area in which we live.

All the consequences are interrelated and interconnected so that some families may be affected by one or two problems or concerns but there will be other families who are facing multiple anxieties, worries and distress. Very few people if any have not been touched or affected by the pandemic.

Whilst thankful for the number of people immunised in the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) we cannot forget the number of deaths.

Whilst the government seeks accolades for immunising the highest number of people in Europe it is important to remember that we also buried the highest number of people in Europe. It was estimated in January 2021, our third 'lockdown' period, that the death rate in the UK was the highest rate in Europe. What is important to say is that each death is and has been an individual tragedy. However, it is crucial to remember that it is also a societal and shared tragedy for us all.

Many mistakes are in evidence. Key and front-line workers did not have the proper PPE (personal protective equipment). The track and trace system did not work well. Our borders were not closed properly or in time. Many older people with Covid-19 were discharged

back into Care Homes spreading the disease even more whilst the National Health Service (NHS) simply did not have the staff, beds or resources to meet the demands made by the pandemic.

Our NHS and Social Care services have been at breaking point because of the numbers with Covid-19. Because of this emergency and non-emergency operations are being cancelled or postponed. Even when the pandemic is under some degree of control there will remain another crisis in health care provision. Cancer treatment; mental ill-health issues; key workers with post-traumatic stress disorder because of what they faced during the height of the pandemic and those suffering from 'long-term' health symptoms are all escalating. Families who have lost loved ones are asking for a public inquiry looking into how the government has handled the pandemic. They want to know why an island nation which is one of the wealthiest countries in the world has fared worst than other countries.

Throughout this time of the pandemic we were washing our hands, staying at home (unless key or front line workers) and protecting the NHS. We were told that we were all equally vulnerable. Yet, it became evident that this was not true. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and all those living in poverty were and remain particularly vulnerable. They are more likely to succumb to the virus and less likely to recover from it.

Why are we in this situation? One factor which MCW members have highlighted is the quantity and scale of hidden poverty and inequality in our country. This has been

exposed by the pandemic. Poverty has apparently doubled since the pandemic. The socio-economic position is an immense factor affecting families, and illustrates the divide between individual, families and communities.

Government intervention has helped through various policies, for example, top-up payments on some social security schemes, job retention schemes, self-employed income support, ban on evictions, loans and grants for business etc. However, these measures are for a limited period only. It also seemed that there were many people who did not qualify for this extra support. The numbers of workers and their families in poverty is rising as the pandemic goes on and as more lockdowns have been experienced.

Since the pandemic our descriptive language has added to the types of poverty that workers experience: There is identifiable, food poverty, child poverty, fuel poverty, digital poverty, education poverty: clearly poverty is the operative word.



< Members of the B45 MCW group

Many workers were already struggling to “make ends meet”; that is just about surviving, living

on the edge of poverty or in poverty because of being employed in precarious jobs or sectors. These workers were more than likely to be dependent on zero hour’s contracts, working in the ‘gig’ economy. It was obvious that the effects of the pandemic on jobs and income were more likely to have the greatest impact on them. They are also the workers whose employers during lockdown cannot or will not top up the government’s 80% contribution of their wages to 100%. This means that their income is now below the minimum wage. Therefore, for too many, it meant that they went out to work risking their own health and that of their family. Even with

government intervention the Social Security “safety net” is inadequate and there is a tremendous rise in the numbers and use of Food Banks.



<Trussel Trust Foodbank

John Bird, who is an Independent Member of the House of Lords and co-founder of

the Big Issue magazine sold by the homeless, wrote recently, referring to the UK as a ‘low wage economy’ “With that you also get low wage education. And on top of that you have low-wage health ... people unable to eat good food ... who can’t rise out of poverty because their schooling prepares them for a low-wage job” (Big Issue 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021).

The role of women is prominent in the health and social care sectors whether carers, cleaners or office workers and therefore frontline and key workers during the pandemic. They are also the majority of workers in the retail, hospitality and the leisure industries; sectors hardest hit by closures and unemployment: The same jobs mostly associated with low pay and precarious zero hour contracts. Again, it is generally women who end up trying to organise the family budget so as to meet overheads and feed the family. Studies indicate that BAME women in the UK are suffering greater financial consequences because they are more likely to be in part-time work, furloughed or losing their jobs. Home schooling too has become another role to add to the needs of the household and more likely to be carried out by the women.

Because of the way the government is working, issuing policies and its basic ideology, Trade Unions, Civil Society, local politicians (in England Local Authority Councillors) and Public Health officials are marginalised as partners;

silenced with hardly any voice. There has been no systematic consultation or engagement. An example of this inequality in engagement has been Track and Trace systems setup along with the imposition of local area or “tier” system lockdowns which have taken place without any consultation or engagement with those who know the area in which they work.

What is essential is that this does not become the ‘norm’ for future governments as a new way of working and a precedent-setting template.

MCW members are well aware and have lived with the consequences of years of austerity policies under various governments. It entailed the creation of a low wage, low skilled market economy dependent on the leisure, hospitality and retail sectors and curtailing union involvement. There was a lessening of direct employment using outsourcing contracts instead. These policies resulted in the growth of precarious work, the growth of poverty, privatised services and a lack of social support networks. Struggling financially the NHS and Local Government cut services to a bare minimum because they did not have sufficient resources to respond. As one MCW member said in summary, “years of austerity did not help us in confronting the pandemic”.

“We reap what we sow” is a well known biblical saying. Morally it can be used when referring, if you are good, to reaping the rewards of goodness or if you are bad perhaps you bring to yourself punishment, being reprimanded and dealt with severely! Yet, in our reality the question to perhaps pose is, who does the sowing and who ends up doing the reaping? It is a crucial question in our Reviews of Life to try and understand who is actually doing the sowing, their philosophy and ideology and what that means for the

ordinary worker and their families. It is generally the powerful who sow, and then decide on the yield, decide who can gather it in and who then gets left with the chaff.



Each reality demands us to ask who are ‘they’ that sow and who is it that is left to reap.

### **Cash-less and Cash-excluded**

There are 2½ million people in the UK who are reliant on cash to pay for essential products. The pandemic has meant that cash withdrawals have plummeted, yet so many still rely on cash for their essential needs. Reasons for this reliance on cash may be lack of access to or not able to use digital technology, not owning a smart phone, or controlling a limited budget. These same people could be one of the 1.4 million who do not have a bank account. Cash machines may still be in evidence but between January 2018 and December 2020 free-to-use machines dropped by 27% whilst there was an increase in pay-to-use ones. Areas like Hall Green and Hodge Hill in Birmingham experienced a reduction in free-to-use (44% and 40% respectively). A Big Issue article (08/03/21) wrote of their vendors still largely reliant on cash.



Age Concern too are concerned about the distance that some older people have to travel to either access an ATM or a bank branch that remains open. ATM machines are run by commercial operators. As less cash is used they either close them down or charge. The Big Issue works with their sellers to get access to and use cards. However, albeit fewer people, there will still be a need of access to cash in the longer term. Once more it is those in poverty, the most deprived areas and communities that will be hardest hit. It is vital that cash access for those that need it most remains.



## **Pope Francis' Message to the International Labour Organisation (ILO)**

**Pope Francis, June 17, 2021, sent a video message to the 109th meeting of the (ILO)**

**Following is the text of the Pope's video message, provided by the Vatican:**

(Apologies, the MCW are unable to add relevant notes originally contained in this article)

Mr. President of the International Labour Organisation,  
Distinguished Representatives of Governments, of Organisations of employees and workers,

I thank the Director-General, Mr. Guy Ryder, who so graciously invited me to present this message to the World of Work Summit. This Conference has been convened at a crucial moment in social and economic history, which presents serious and far-reaching challenges to the entire world. In recent months, the International Labour Organisation, through its periodic reports, has done a commendable job of dedicating particular attention to our most vulnerable brothers and sisters.

During this persistent crisis, we should continue to exercise “special care” for the common good. Many of the possible and expected upheavals have not yet manifested themselves; careful decisions will therefore be required. The decrease in working hours in recent years has resulted in both job losses and a reduction in the working day of those who have kept them. Many public services, as well as many businesses, have faced tremendous difficulties, some running the risk of total or partial bankruptcy. In 2020 we saw unprecedented loss of employment all over the world.

In our haste to return to greater economic activity, at the end of the Covid-19 threat, let us avoid excessive fixations on benefit, isolation and nationalism, blind consumerism, and denial of the clear evidence of discrimination against our “dispensable” brothers and sisters in our society.

On the contrary, let us look for solutions that will help us build a new future of work based on decent and dignified working conditions, originating in collective negotiation, and promoting the common good, a phrase that will make work an essential component of our care for society and Creation. In this sense, work is truly and essentially human. That is what it is about, that it is human.

Recalling the fundamental role that this organisation and this conference play as privileged arenas for constructive dialogue, we are called upon to prioritise our response to workers on the margins of the labour market who are still affected by the Covid-19 pandemic; low-skilled workers, day labourers, those who work illegally, migrant and refugee workers, those who carry out what is commonly referred to as “work of the three dimensions”: dangerous, dirty and degrading, and the list could go on.

Many migrants and vulnerable workers, together with their families, usually remain excluded from access to national health promotion, disease prevention, treatment and care programs, as well as financial protection plans and psychosocial services. This is one of the many cases of this philosophy of exclusion that we have become accustomed to imposing on our societies. This exclusion complicates early detection, testing, diagnosis, contact tracing, and seeking medical care for Covid-19 for refugees and migrants, and thus increases the risk of outbreaks in those populations. Such outbreaks

may not be controlled or may even be actively concealed, posing an additional threat to public health. The lack of social protection measures in the face of the impact of Covid-19 has resulted in increased poverty, unemployment, underemployment, an increase in illegal work, delay in the inclusion of young people in the labour market, which is very serious, increased child labour, even more serious, vulnerability to human trafficking, food insecurity and increased exposure to infection among populations such as the sick and elderly. I am grateful for this opportunity to set out some key concerns and observations.

Firstly, it is the fundamental mission of the Church to appeal to everyone to work together, with governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society, to serve and care for the common good and to ensure the participation of all in this endeavour. No one should be left aside in a dialogue for the common good, whose goal is, above all, to build and consolidate peace and trust among all. The most vulnerable – young people, migrants, indigenous communities, and the poor – cannot be set aside in a dialogue that should also bring together governments, businesses, and workers. It is also essential that all denominations and religious communities engage together. The Church has a long experience of participating in these dialogues through its local communities, popular movements, and organizations, and she offers herself to the world as a builder of bridges to help create the conditions for such a dialogue or, where appropriate, to help facilitate it. These dialogues for the common good are essential for achieving a solidarity-based and sustainable future for our common home and should be held at both community, national and international levels. And one of the hallmarks of true dialogue is that those in dialogue have the same level of rights and obligations. It cannot be that one who has fewer rights or more rights dialogues with one who does not. The same level of rights and obligations thus guarantees a serious dialogue.

Secondly, it is also essential to the mission of the Church to ensure that all people obtain the protection they need according to their vulnerability: illness, age, disability, displacement, marginalisation, or dependency. Social protection systems, which themselves are facing major risks, must be supported and expanded to ensure access to health services, food, and basic human needs. In times of emergency, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, special assistance measures are required. Particular attention to integral and effective provision of care through public services is equally important. Social protection systems have been called upon to meet many of the challenges of the crisis, and at the same time, their weak points have become more evident. Finally, the protection of workers and the most vulnerable must be ensured through the respect of their fundamental rights, including the right to organise in unions. That is, organising in unions is a right. The Covid-19 crisis has already affected the most vulnerable, and they should not be negatively affected by measures to accelerate a recovery-focused solely on economic indicators. Or rather, here we also need a reform of the economic system, a deep reform of the economy. The way the economy is run must be different, it must also change.

At this time of reflection, as we seek to shape our future action and shape a post-Covid-19 international agenda, we should pay particular attention to the very real danger of forgetting those who have been left behind. They run the risk of being attacked by a virus even worse than Covid-19: that of selfish indifference. That is, a society cannot progress by discarding. This virus spreads by thinking that life is better if it is better for me and that everything is fine if it is fine for me, and so we begin and end by selecting one person over another, rejecting the poor, sacrificing those who have been left behind,

on the so-called “altar of progress”. It is a truly elitist dynamic, of building up new elites at the cost of discarding many people and many communities.

Looking to the future, it is fundamental that the Church, and therefore the action of the Holy See with the International Labour Organisation, support measures that correct unjust or incorrect situations that condition labour relations and that completely subjugate them to the idea of “exclusion”, or that violate the fundamental rights of workers. A threat is posed by theories that consider benefit and consumption as independent elements or as autonomous variables of economic life, excluding workers and determining their unbalanced standard of living: “Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 53).

The current pandemic has reminded us that there are no differences or boundaries between those who suffer. We are all fragile and, at the same time, all of great value. We hope that what is happening around us will shake us to our core. The time has come to eliminate inequalities, to cure the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family. Faced with the Agenda of the International Labour Organisation, we must continue as we did in 1931, when Pope Pius XI, after the Wall Street crisis and in the midst of the “Great Depression”, denounced the asymmetry between workers and entrepreneurs as a flagrant injustice that gave *carte blanche* and means to capital. He said that: “Property that is, ‘capital’, has undoubtedly long been able to appropriate too much to itself. Whatever was produced, whatever returns accrued, capital claimed for itself, hardly leaving to the worker enough to restore and renew his strength” (*Quadragesimo Anno*, 55). Even in those circumstances, the Church promoted the position that the amount of pay for work done should not only be intended to meet the immediate and current needs of workers but also to open up the ability of workers to safeguard their families’ future savings and investments to provide a margin of security for the future.

Thus, since the first session of the International Conference, the Holy See has been advocating a uniform regulation applicable to work in all its different aspects, as a guarantee for workers. It is conviction that works, and therefore workers, can count on guarantees, support, and empowerment if they are protected from the “game” of deregulation. Moreover, legal norms must be geared towards employment growth, dignified work, and the rights and duties of the human person. These are all necessary means for his or her well-being, for integral human development, and for the common good.

The Catholic Church and the International Labour Organisation, responding to their different natures and functions, can continue to implement their respective strategies, but they can also continue to seize opportunities to collaborate in a wide variety of important actions.

In order to promote this common action, it is necessary to understand work correctly. The first element of this understanding calls for us to focus on all forms of work, including non-standard forms of employment. Work goes beyond what is traditionally known as “formal employment” and the Decent Work Agenda must include all forms of work. The lack of social protection for workers in the informal or hidden economy and their families makes them particularly vulnerable to clashes, that is, they cannot rely on the protection

offered by social insurance or social assistance schemes aimed at tackling poverty. Women in the hidden economy, including street vendors and domestic workers, feel the impact of Covid-19 in many ways, from isolation to extreme exposure to health risks. As there are no accessible day-care centres, the children of these workers are exposed to an increased health risk because their mothers have to take them with them to the workplace or leave them unattended at home. Therefore, it must be ensured that social assistance reaches the hidden economy and pays special attention to the particular needs of women and girls.

The pandemic reminds us that many women around the world continue to mourn the lack of freedom, justice, and equality among all human beings: “Even though significant advances have been made in the recognition of women’s rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done to promote those rights. Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and the various forms of enslavement ... I think ... of their lack of equal access to dignified work and roles of decision-making” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 54).

The second element for a correct understanding of work: if work is a relationship, then it must include the dimension of care because no relationship can survive without care. Here we are not just referring to care work: the pandemic reminds us of its fundamental importance, which we have perhaps overlooked.

Care *goes further*; it must be a dimension of all work. Work that does not take care, that destroys Creation, that endangers the survival of future generations, does not respect the dignity of workers, and cannot be considered decent. On the contrary, work that cares, which contributes to the restoration of full human dignity, will help to ensure a sustainable future for future generations. And in this dimension of care, workers are involved, first and foremost. In other words, a question we can ask ourselves in our daily lives is how, for example, a company takes care of its workers.

In addition to a correct understanding of work, emerging from the current crisis in better conditions will require the development of a culture of solidarity, to combat the throwaway culture that is at the root of inequality and that afflicts the world. In order to achieve this goal, it will be necessary to accord value to the contribution of all those cultures, such as indigenous ones, popular ones, which are often considered marginal, but which keep alive the practice of solidarity, which “express much more than a few sporadic acts of generosity”. Every community can have its own culture. I think it is time to finally free ourselves of the legacy of the Enlightenment, which associated the word culture with a certain type of intellectual formation and social belonging. Every community can have its own culture and we have to accept it as it is. “It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combating the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land, and housing, the denial of social and labour rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history, and this is what popular movements are doing” (*Fratelli tutti*, 116).

With these words I address you, the participants in the 109th International Labour Conference, because as institutionalised actors in the world of work, you have a great opportunity to influence the processes of change already underway. Your responsibility is great, but the good you can achieve is even greater. I, therefore, invite you to respond

to the challenge we face. Established actors can count on the legacy of their history, which continues to be a resource of fundamental importance, but in this historical phase they are called upon to remain open to the dynamism of society and to promote the emergence and inclusion of less traditional and more marginalised actors, bearers of alternative and innovative impulses.

I ask political leaders and those who work in governments to always seek inspiration in that form of love that is political charity: "it is an equally indispensable act of love to strive to organise and structure society so that one's neighbour will not find themselves in poverty. It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know that person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering. If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity. While one person can help another by providing something to eat, the politician creates a job for that other person, and thus practices a lofty form of charity that ennoble his or her political activity" (*Fratelli tutti*, 186).

I remind businesspeople of their true vocation: to produce wealth in the service of all. Business activity is essentially "a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world. God encourages us to develop the talents He gave us, and He has made our universe one of immense potential. In God's plan, each individual is called to promote his or her own development, and this includes finding the best economic and technological means of multiplying goods and increasing wealth. Business abilities, which are a gift from God, should always be clearly directed to the development of others and to eliminating poverty, especially through the creation of diversified work opportunities. The right to private property is always accompanied by the primary and prior principle of the subordination of all private property to the universal destination of the earth's goods, and thus the right of all to their use" (*Fratelli tutti*, 123). Sometimes, in speaking of private property we forget that it is a secondary right, which depends on this primary right, which is the universal destination of goods.

I call on trade unionists and leaders of workers' associations not to allow themselves to be "straitjacketed", to focus on the real situations of the neighbourhoods and communities in which they operate while addressing issues related to broader economic policies and "macro-relationships". Even in this historical phase, the trade union movement faces two major challenges. The first is prophecy, linked to the very nature of trade unions, to their most genuine vocation. Trade unions are an expression of the prophetic profile of society. Trade unions are born and reborn every time that, like the biblical prophets, they give a voice to those who do not have one, denounce those who would "buy the poor ... for a pair of sandals" as the prophet says (cf. *Amos 2: 6*), expose the powerful who trample on the rights of the most vulnerable workers, defend the cause of foreigners, the least and the rejected. Clearly, when a trade union becomes corrupt, it can no longer do this, and its status transforms into that of a pseudo-employer, itself distanced from the people.

The second challenge is innovation. The prophets are sentinels that keep watch from their post. Trade unions must also guard the walls of the city of work, like a guard who watches over and protects those inside the city of work, but who also watches over and protects those outside the walls. Trade unions do not fulfil their fundamental function of social innovation if they only protect pensioners. This must be done, but it is half of your

job. Your vocation is also to protect those who do not yet have rights, those who are excluded from work, and who are also excluded from rights and democracy.

Dear participants in the tripartite processes of the International Labour Organisation and of this International Labour Conference, the Church supports you, she walks beside you. The Church makes her resources available, beginning with her spiritual resources and her Social Doctrine. The pandemic has taught us that we are all in the same boat and that only together can we emerge from the crisis.

### **Food Banks – News Briefing, The Tablet, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

‘Christians must be at the forefront of ensuring that no one in our society had to rely on food banks, said the Bishop of Middlesbrough. While he noted that churches play a “crucial role” in supporting society’s most vulnerable, and have done so throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, “it is important that, while continuing to extend compassion and

crisis support to people facing crisis in our communities we also seek to challenge and change the drivers of poverty that are putting so many people in this position, and this means tackling unjust systems that trap people in poverty and working to build a fairer society”

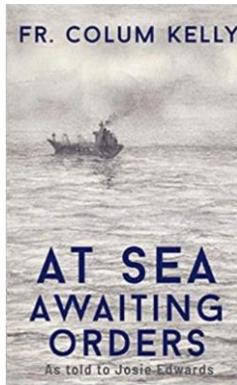


### **“Food parcel distribution has topped two million”**

The Trussell Trust reports that ‘food banks in its UK network gave more than 2.5 million emergency food parcels to people facing crisis between April 2020 and April 2021’ ([www.trusselltrust.org](http://www.trusselltrust.org)). Whilst they have recorded an increase of 33% of need during the year this figure does not take into account all the other food aid groups which have been

established to meet local demand and need. The Trust goes on to make the salient point that ‘Hunger in the UK isn’t about food, it’s about people not having enough money for the basics and with high rates of unemployment and record redundancies more people than ever need the social security system to provide a strong enough lifeline to stay afloat’. The CEO, Emma Revie, said “No one should face the indignity of needing emergency food”.

From various seminar presentations, articles and Reviews of Life the MCW is also only too aware that in-work poverty, i.e. working families, also experience poverty. Low wages appear to be an obvious factor. Even the government’s support of 80% furlough up to a monthly cap still meant that many workers were employed by those who would not or could not top up wages to 100% resulting in again a cut in the income of many a household. This subsidy is now being tapered from July to September as the Scheme is wound down. The furlough percentage is now being tapered, 70%, 60% The IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research) thinktank in their report ‘*No Longer Managing*’ have identified three other contributing factors; housing costs, social security support not meeting rental outlay and a lack of affordable childcare. It has been estimated that one in six working households cannot make ends meet. Without both short and long term policy interventions which recognise, echoing the True of Experience theme of this MCW Review, the “true costs and obstacles people face when struggling to make work pay. Otherwise more and more families who were once ‘just about managing’ will join the growing numbers who are ‘no longer managing’.” [www.ippr.org](http://www.ippr.org)



## A Life on the Ocean Wave A Review of Fr Colum Kelly's "At Sea awaiting orders" by Paul Edwards

After 18 months of a global pandemic, lockdown, furlough, "save the NHS", job losses, and vaccination roll out, very little has been heard or indeed written about the role of merchant seafarers in ensuring we have been able to buy throughout the COVID-19 crisis most of our essentials. "It's an invisible world, and yet the lives of the people who bring all this to us remain a mystery".<sup>i</sup>

I recently read a thought-provoking book that does shine a light on these lives. My dad was a merchant seafarer. He joined the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS)<sup>ii</sup> on 22 October 1939, in Sydney whilst on his first trip sailing out of Liverpool with the White Star Line. He told me about their excellent work and how he had been welcomed by the AOS as a merchant seafarer in ports all over the world. I learnt from him how AOS was a life saver for hundreds and thousands of merchant seafarers in his day. It remains so today. However due to globalisation, technology, and the drive for profit, for the modern seafarers it is different from my dad's time in the 1930's and 40's. They now spend a lot less time in port, are often only there for a few hours, and frequently away from their families and loved ones for extended periods.

"At Sea Awaiting Orders" is a short but moving personal testimony by one of its chaplains Fr. Colum Kelly, who recently retired as port chaplain of AOS on the South Bank of the Humber in the port of Immingham.

I have no idea if he ever encountered the YCW or MCW, yet he clearly recognised that his ministry was deeply rooted in the concrete life experiences, struggles, aspirations and hopes of the seafarers he encountered every day. In the introduction he describes a meeting with a ships' cook, who smiled saying thank you for visiting the ship, shook his hand while surreptitiously transferring a piece of paper. Having discreetly stuffed it in his pocket, he unfolded it later to read the following "*No salary 9 months. Please help*". "This is ministry in the raw" writes Colum.<sup>iii</sup>

He reflects on his ministry as a chaplain and pulls no punches about the level of exploitation and poor working conditions. Seafarers today are often from the developing world. Many of whom are wage slaves, suffering injustice and indignity, living in dread of blacklisting and consequent privations for their families back home. "People trafficking and enslavement are even occurring in merchant and shipping fleets",<sup>iv</sup> he writes.

Whilst sharing with the reader the harsh reality of life for seafarers, exploitation, long periods away from their families, which have been extended due to Covid, Colum also shares some lighter moments of joy. One such uplifting moment was the day he offered to take a crew that was in port from India on a bus ride suggesting perhaps a day trip to the beautiful and historical city of Lincoln. Sixteen men boarded the bus and when Colum asks, "Where shall we go? The captain replied, "we would like to go somewhere where we can walk on grass". "My eyes were opened to the harsh reality of the shipping world..."<sup>v</sup>

Colum's description of how the sixteen men simply walked barefoot on the grass in silence is quite powerful. Moreover, the impact of his actions had a profound effect on them.

This book is well worth a read; Colum's account of his ministry to seafarers is a powerful testimony to the harsh reality of their lives. "Going to where the hurt is." He evokes a

Gospel passage that is so familiar to us in the Cardijn movements, where we are called to respond to people in need, as Jesus' taught his disciples: Matthew 25: 35-36

*For I was hungry, and you fed me, I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to see me.*  
Matthew 25: 35-36.

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<sup>i</sup> At Sea Awaiting Orders, as told to Josie Edwards, Created with Vellum.

<https://www.stellamaris.org.uk/product/at-sea-awaiting-orders/>

<sup>ii</sup> Founded in Glasgow in October 1920, now known today as Stella Maris

<sup>iii</sup> At Sea Awaiting Orders, as told to Josie Edwards, Created with Vellum.

<https://www.stellamaris.org.uk/product/at-sea-awaiting-orders/>

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<sup>iv</sup> Ibid page 23

<sup>v</sup> Ibid page 65



### **'Once you have got yourself elected onto the committee there is no knowing where you will stop' – Research by Pat Jones**

The above quote comes from a YCW campaign newsletter article in the early 1950s, aimed at encouraging young female workers to get involved in union activities in their workplaces.

This research theme germinated because of Pat's mother who came from a northern working class family growing up in a Lancashire pit village. She left school at 14 with no qualifications, but became the National Secretary of the YCW's, what was then the girl's movement, around 1950-51. As a national leader she gave talks around the country and went to International meetings in Rome and elsewhere. Whilst her sisters and brothers went into service or factory work or 'down the pit', her life was changed by the YCW. Suspecting that there are many such stories of women leaders Pat, working as a post-doctoral research associate at Durham University, wants to meet or talk to women who were involved in the YCW in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

The stories of working class girls and women are rarely told and the stories of working class Catholic women and girls are almost invisible, both in the Church and in wider social history. Pat thinks there is a story here which should be told. Are you one of these women? Would you be willing to look back at your experiences and reflect on it with Pat? Interviews can be arranged by Zoom, WhatsApp, Facetime or by phone. Pat's contact details are:



[pat19jones@gmail.com](mailto:pat19jones@gmail.com)

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