



The First Sunday of Lent, February 21<sup>st</sup> 2021

Dear Friends,

This year, we are supporting the Diocesan Lent Appeal, which in turn is supporting the Church in Wales Centenary Appeal, which will help fund two projects – one at home, partnering with Housing Justice Cymru, and one abroad, through Christian Aid. Details of how you can contribute are overleaf, but why these two projects?



Last year, the Church in Wales celebrated its centenary although we were, of course, unable to do so in the way in which we'd hoped. Co-incidentally, the Episcopal Church of South Sudan also celebrated its centenary in 2020 and its first bishop was a Welshman, Llewelyn Henry Gwynne of Swansea.

The situation the two churches find themselves in, though, could not be more different. Whilst we are facing a physical and mental health crisis as well as economic difficulties, South Sudan is facing one of war and conflict, with thousands of people dead and nearly four million displaced to live as refugees in neighbouring countries.

South Sudan became an independent country in 2011 amid much hope and optimism, following a referendum in which its people voted overwhelmingly to separate from Sudan. However, following a political crisis which erupted in 2013 and the breakdown of a partial peace agreement in mid-2016, South Sudan has spiralled into a conflict which has spread across the whole country. A new peace agreement signed in September 2019 is being implemented only very slowly and does not include all armed groups, so fighting continues in several parts of the country,

Conflict adds to the problems of a poor country, through the displacement of people, the disruption of already poor public services such as education and health and the erosion of social structures. Efforts to develop the economy or public services are severely hampered by armed conflict.

Disease and malnutrition have severely affected women and children especially, and psychological trauma is widespread. Cases of human rights violations, including torture, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial executions and sexual and gender-based violence have been widely reported, with sexual violence being used as a weapon of war by all sides of the conflict. Women suffer disproportionately in conflicts while also being excluded from many opportunities to influence efforts toward peace. Without peace, there will be no prosperity. Tackling conflict is essential before South Sudan can experience any real difference in poverty levels and all its effects.

As with Christian Aid's work around the world, the work in South Sudan is done through local partners. Often against the odds, within a challenging environment and ongoing insecurity, these partners make a considerable difference in communities across the nation through humanitarian, peacebuilding, development and advocacy work.

The Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Committee (JPRC) – a department of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan – is a Christian Aid partner. Through activities such as peace and reconciliation workshops, trauma healing, conferences, advocacy, peace prayer vigils, training for church, youth, community and civil society leaders and tribal chiefs, the JPRC has a vision to see a peaceful society, free from violence and hatred and is reaching hundreds of people with its message for hope.

The Church in Wales Centenary Appeal will aim to fund an additional staff member within the JPRC, thus ensuring that this vital work is enhanced at a critical moment in the nation's life.

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When you think of homelessness, do you envision people huddled in blankets in shop doorways? While the pandemic has seen massive efforts to get rough sleepers off the streets, in 'normal' times it has been estimated that 2,900 people sleep rough each year. But, says Housing Justice Cymru (HJC), that represents just 7% of those who are currently affected by homelessness in the Principality, people may be trapped in temporary accommodation or hostels and shelters. Or they may be 'sofa surfing' with friends or family. Statistics from HJC show that 9,993 households were at risk of homelessness last year.

The Church's centenary appeal had planned to support the work of the charity's night shelters but in the light of the pandemic, they have updated their approach to tackling homelessness, launching The Citadel Project. The aim is to help people maintain their tenancies and accommodation arrangements to prevent a return to homelessness by matching people with trained volunteers to work with individuals to identify their needs and address them together.

That could mean connecting with the local community, help with finding employment, accessing a sport, when that's possible, or a new hobby. They also offer advocacy to help families and individuals access the services they need such as health or financial services.

Last August 476 people were moved into suitable long-term accommodation, which is fantastic news, says HJC, but it does mean there is now a new wave of vulnerable people who need support to maintain their tenancy.

And the charity estimates that, of the 407 people who were accommodated in the first lockdown, one in four have already returned to the streets.

According to recent research, 90% of those who had experienced homelessness in the last five years are still worried about their housing situation. Additionally, 82% of those the charity have helped in the past say they need further support.

Housing Justice Cymru's work has become more preventative, helping people find permanent accommodation and then helping them to stay there.

Without faith and community projects such as this, the number of people affected by homelessness would, they say be a staggering 40% higher. Your support makes a huge difference.

Could you help support these two charities and their vital work – giving something back this Lent, rather than giving something up?

**Holy Trinity** congregation is being asked if they would follow their previous pattern of giving their weekly donation to the Appeal.

**Christchurch** will donate using existing church funds – but if anyone would like to contribute on an individual basis please do so using the following method.

**St Mary's and St Peter's:**

- Please send a cheque, made payable to St Mary's Priory Church, to Robin Smith, St Mary's Priory, Monk Street, Abergavenny NP7 5ND.
- Or, if you normally drop off weekly envelopes to Robin, or to any other churchwarden, you can do that, but please mark your envelope 'Lent Appeal'.
- But please don't post cash, or put cash in the postbox on the Vicarage gate

Your help for these two projects will be very much appreciated whether that is by people who are helped to stay off the streets or their friends' sofas in Wales, or by people who are suffering through the horrors of war in South Sudan.

With all good wishes

*Jeff*

P.S.: You can find out more about the Church in Wales Centenary Appeal by logging on to [churchinwales.org.uk/en/about-us/our-campaigns/centenary-appeal/](http://churchinwales.org.uk/en/about-us/our-campaigns/centenary-appeal/)