



NJPN Comment

Advent with Pax Christi

Valerie Flessati

There will be an air of expectation as the lights are dimmed and a single candle is brought up the aisle. The congregation stills, and everyone responds to the opening chant: 'Word of Justice: alleluia.... Come to dwell here: Maranatha'.

It's that time of year again, when Pax Christi's annual Advent service opens our minds to reflect on the 'big picture' of the Christian story, reaching back to God's promises from ancient times.

This is most definitely an Advent service, with music and readings which dwell on Advent themes rather than anticipate Christmas. They express our acute discomfort that there is such a big gap between the vision of harmony on God's holy mountain and our quarrelsome, confused and competitive world, which so badly needs a Saviour. They express our deep longing that all God's family should live in peace, plenty, freedom and justice... contrasted with the reality that for so many is cruelty, war, poverty and fear, instead.

With this international perspective, readings are drawn from different parts of the world, and some songs are in Hebrew and Arabic, some Taizé Latin, often African and Caribbean too. We reflect on the experience of Our Lady – linked in John Bell's song commemorating refugees fleeing from home today: 'If my name was Mary... would you find a place for me?' Bethlehem is not forgotten, and during the service people are invited to write a message of hope and solidarity for Pax Christi's partners in the Holy Land.

There is a deep sense of prayer at the heart of the Advent service when everyone is invited to light a candle for peace – in the Middle East, in Yemen, in Congo, in Colombia and Mexico... and for our own country, neighbourhoods and families.

This is very much a 'people's service' with lay people, young and old, leading the prayers and reflections. Going out to the gospel rhythms of 'Soon and very soon we shall see the King...', and attracted by the aroma of mulled wine, the congregation will move into the Advent market of gifts from the Philippines, Palestine, African and Traidcraft products. If you're going to be in London enrich your Advent by coming along to this inspiring event.

The Pax Christi Advent service is at 7pm on Tuesday, 11th December at St Aloysius Church, Phoenix Road, Euston, London NW1 1TA.

Valerie Flessati is a vice-president of Pax Christi.