

TONY MCNICHOLL JUSTICE AND PEACE WORKER AND MAN OF GOD 1942 – 2022

Tony was a man of many talents and a varied working career. He had a lifelong love of the sea through working in shipyards and then becoming a Merchant Seaman and visiting many countries around the globe. Later in life he owned several small sailing boats and enjoyed taking them out around Anglesey. He was very proud of his time volunteering as a crew member and then as leader for groups of youth on one of the Tall Ships.

He changed from being on the sea to in the air when he joined the RAF and was posted to Anglesey and then to Singapore in 1972. The whole family, wife and four girls, returned to Anglesey when his wife, Elizabeth, became ill and sadly died. He left the RAF and took up renovating engines.

In 1979 he married Pat who came with her daughter and in 1981 they had a son together, Aidan. After a spell in Holyhead boatyard Tony decided he wanted to pass on his many skills to the next generation. He became a teacher after studying for 3 years at Bangor University and worked in the OMI college at Rhos on Sea until it closed in 1992. He then worked for some time as a copy editor with Professor David Crystal, a linguist, on the Cambridge Encyclopedia, work he greatly enjoyed until he was made redundant in 2008. His work in Justice and Peace was brought to the fore when he took up post as Diocesan Justice and Peace worker.

Parishioners at St Mary's Church in Holyhead knew him as a very active and caring member of the parish. He was a reader; he built the Christmas Crib for many years and trained altar servers. Tony was very musical; he learnt the violin at school and went on to play the clarinet, the guitar, the piano and the penny whistle. He sang with the St Mary's church choir, was a cantor, and sang with the Holyhead festival choir and the Diocesan Choir. He supported CAFOD, Pax Christi, and the Romero Trust, organising parish events, supporting campaigns and fundraising. This included walking part of the Camino de Santiago across northern Spain.

He was involved with Fair Trade promotion on Anglesey. He participated in Churches Together in Holyhead. He joined protests in Birmingham and London for Jubilee debt relief, Make Poverty History and climate change. Till very recently Tony run a J&P network emailing information about petitions and events to likeminded people all over North Wales and beyond. More recently he was a member of Croeso Menai and helped to support the settlement of Syrian refugees on Anglesey, up until 2021 when Tony was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis; a devastating, life-limiting condition that would severely affect his ability to breathe and to continue with the activities he loved. He died peacefully at home in the early hours of Monday, 25th July 2022.

A much loved husband, father, brother and friend who lived out his Catholic faith to the full, and will be missed by so many people.

Below are some tributes from colleagues and friends who worked with him, in the Wrexham Diocese, on social justice issues both as paid workers and volunteers in his many interests:

Anna Jane Evans former Christian Aid worker and now Presbyterian minister:

Tony was a very special man - I had the privilege of working with him on Fairtrade and other justice issues over many years and was always inspired by his commitment and tirelessness in pursuing a better world. He had a real and deep faith and a clear vision of the world as it should be. He always worked to make his prayer for God's kingdom to come on earth a reality. His passion for justice covered so many issues and topics. He deeply felt the pain of injustice and used it as an energy for change. The world will be a poorer place without him - but I thank God for his dedication and friendship and trust that the seeds of the kingdom faithfully sown will and are already bearing fruit.

Katja Jewell – former CAFOD organiser for the Wrexham Diocese:

"This is our God, the Servant King He calls us now to follow Him." When I think of Tony I think of this beautiful Hymn of Graham Kendrick – The Servant King. Tony loved to sing, he was a member of the diocesan choir and also enriched many events, vigils and retreats with his singing. I first met Tony when I started in CAFOD in Spring 2005. Tony was the Justice and Peace worker of the Diocese of Wrexham. I was inexperienced and felt green and nervous to meet all the great leaders. But in Tony's presence you could not feel out of place for long, as there was always room in his heart and in his actions to make space for your needs also your abilities. It was a joy to learn and to grow with Sister Vianney and him into my role.

It felt to me that Christ, the servant king was not just his light, his lead but also his friend. Tony invited us all to follow Christ to bring about the kingdom of God already now, as much as we could. He organised events, send out petitions, till just days before he died, offerings to which we could say our 'yes'. His own pain, when losing his son, never disabled him from reaching out to others to help or to challenge systems which made them suffer. Tony always spoke with huge love and pride about his whole family. We will miss Tony badly. But I will always be grateful for knowing this generous man and his open invitation to join him to follow Christ.

Maria Pizzoni - Diocesan Justice and Peace worker from 2008 – 2013:

Tony was obviously a man of great faith and dedicated to working for justice but he was also a very kind man. I took over from him as Justice and Peace worker and although we had been competing for the same position he called me shortly after, very kindly, and filled me in on what had been achieved so far. He was always ready to answer questions and to be a shoulder to cry on. His enthusiasm and dedication was often something that revived my drooping spirits. Tony did not always see results for his efforts but, like the prophets of old, continued anyway.

This quote from Timothy Radcliff OP sums up many of our conversations together. "Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on.... you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no results at all..... As you get used to this idea you start more and more to concentrate, not on results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself."

Tony was a prophet; and as such had his hand firmly in God's as he lived out the Kingdom in his parish, his family and the lives he touched with his generous kindness.

Sr Vianney Connolly - Ursuline sister who set up the CAFOD office in Wrexham Diocese 30 years ago and worked with Tony for many years, both when he was a volunteer and paid Diocesan worker:

Tony for me was a wonderful, selfless Networker. Over the years he had "shouldered the yoke of Jesus" and in person, or from far-off Anglesey, he drew our attention to important justice and peace issues and events with simplicity and directness. On one occasion I experienced what a just man Tony himself was! No criticism of the person who treated him unjustly, no reproach, just a request for advice as the best way to retrieve the money owing to him.

Tony lived what Jesus invites us all to strive after: "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Mt 11 v.28

Thank you, Tony. May the God of Justice and Peace reward you richly.

Anne O'Connor, Editor NW NJPN E Bulletin: *We never met him in person but corresponded many times. Tony was very supportive of the NW bulletin when I first contacted other J&P Workers in the North West with the idea of a joint venture and sent me articles every so often. When my daughter Annie died I was touched by a beautiful message from Tony. He quoted some words from a funeral booklet he had picked up in a church. He said he had been struck by the title – 'The metamorphosis of ...' and said it was "a lovely way to describe our transition from life in this world to the next which surely applies to your daughter".*

The website below pays tribute to Tony with a link to donate to the charity for Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis.

<https://anthony-mcnicholl.muchloved.com/>