

Acting locally - nonviolence in the community



Read through the article below.

- *Are there openings/opportunities for your parish / group to explore the theme 'Helping young people to make the right choice?'*
 - *Is there opportunity in your parish/group to explore why young people join gangs? Do you know of local projects that are challenging violence/knife or gun crime that could be supported by your parish/group?*
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On the tube one day in 2007 I opened a free newspaper and recognised a photograph of a fellow parishioner: Lorraine Dinnegan. The shocking story was that her 14-year-old son Martin had been stabbed and killed in an unprovoked attack by a gang of boys.

In subsequent months our Justice and Peace group considered what we could do to oppose the fashion for knife crime. We held a discussion day for concerned adults on 'Overcoming Violence - for the sake of our children', asking 'how can we help to make a safer world for them?'

To raise awareness we organised an annual peace walk in memory of Martin - taking families round five local peace gardens. We invited Barry Mizen to come and speak about the safer streets scheme he and Margaret had organised in south London after the murder of their son, Jimmy.

More substantially, we worked over several years, with London Citizens and the police, persuading shops round Finsbury Park station to become 'CitySafe' havens. Staff were briefed, and the shops displayed a sticker indicating that this was where young people could find refuge if they were frightened or threatened. Lorraine Dinnegan herself campaigned energetically, and with the encouragement of the J & P group gave many talks at schools and events for young people.

In the years since then the epidemic of knife crime persists. Tragically, hundreds more have been murdered or injured - most of them young men in their teens and twenties, from all



ethnicities, and right across London. Our J & P group continues to ask the question: how can we help to prevent this?

St Mellitus church is on a prominent corner near parks and estates where these crimes have happened, so we commissioned a large banner for outside the church, proclaiming 'Choose Life. Drop the knife'. Parishioners joined the police searching for weapons in a local park and, shockingly, found knives hidden in flower beds near the children's playground.

In 2018 we installed a weapons bin on parish land. Provided by the charity Word4Weapons, these secure bins are successful in taking weapons off the streets, and hundreds of knives, and even guns, are being deposited in them. Following our initiative, Caritas Westminster has helped to fund weapons bins in other London parishes, and Islington Council has sponsored more across the borough.



Awareness is important, and we have distributed information advising parishioners about how to help young people who may be vulnerable to grooming by gangs - and about the many holiday activities for young people which are offered by our local Councils.

Our J & P group has developed a tradition of holding a short silent vigil in the street whenever a murder has occurred nearby. In 2025 we held a memorial ceremony for all those who had died violently in recent years, reading out the names of 50 young victims of knife crime, and lighting candles in their memory, with some of their family members present. We mourn with them, and we continue to campaign to make knife crime a thing of the past.

Valerie Flessati, Vice-President of Pax Christi



Pax Christi

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Catholic Nonviolence Initiative

www.nonviolencejustpeace.net