IRISH SCHOOL OF ECUMENICS

IS THERE A COMMON GOOD?

LIVING TOWARDS THE PEOPLE'S VISION

AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Cathy Higgins
and Johnston McMaster

Foreword

The Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) was founded in Dublin in 1971 by the late Reverend Michael Hurley, SJ. The school offers postgraduate degrees in Dublin and Belfast and is committed to blending academic excellence with theory and praxis in building peace and achieving reconciliation within and between nations and also amongst faith communities. In Northern Ireland and the Border Counties, the school has offered community education programmes and developed Inter-Church Fora. In 2021 the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. To mark the occasion, one of the initiatives of ISE's Trust Steering Committee was a three-year education and research project for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties entitled: Is There A Common Good? This publication is the fourth resource developed from the project. The other publications include:

1. *Is There A Common Good? Is the Past Preventing the Future and the Common Good?* Cathy Higgins and Kirstie Wright (eds), 2022.
2. *Is There A Common Good? An Educational Resource*, Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster, 2023.
3. *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision*, Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster, 2023.

A fifth publication, to resource the third course in this educational manual entitled *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, written by Johnston McMaster, will be forthcoming.

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Context and Process:

In 2021 the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin celebrated its 50th anniversary. To mark the occasion, one of the initiatives of ISE's Trust Steering Committee was a three-year education and research project for Northern Ireland and the border counties entitled: Is there a Common Good? The three-year project was completed in 2023 and three publications were produced. These were:

1. *Is There A Common Good? Is the Past Preventing the Future and the Common Good?* Cathy Higgins and Kirstie Wright (eds), 2022.
2. *Is There A Common Good? An Educational Resource*, Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster, 2023.
3. *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision*, Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster, 2023.

It was agreed that further educational resources should be developed to become the basis of civic conversations and civic education. *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision* is the basis for two educational courses in this current publication. A third course also is included entitled *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, which is based on a forthcoming publication by Johnston McMaster. This was outlined in the third publication in the Appendix entitled Educational Strategy for the Common Good, Programme Three. The above is part of a developmental process, which remains open ended, leaving space for further development.

Thematic Explorations:

Course 1, entitled 'Integrated Reconciliation: A Common Good Vision for Society?' provides the opportunity to explore six integrated strands of reconciliation: the socio-political, the socio-economic, the socio-environmental, the socio-legal, the socio-psychological and the socio-spiritual. The six integrated strands provide a template for social reconciliation locally and globally.

Course 2, entitled 'Valuing the Common Good' was a response to a demand that emerged as this education and research programme progressed to reimagine values underpinning any vision of the common good and for strategic action, going beyond words. Values are not values without action, they are lived and embodied in the practice of the common good. The course explores what it means to live common good values.

Course 3, entitled 'Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics' explores the history and practice of democracy, the nature of politics and the politics of justice. It explores also active citizenship, our role as citizens of the earth, and being active citizens through collective responsibility.

Civic Conversations:

In a world of political discourse exchanges are increasingly becoming toxic and too often there is incitement to violence. In this context the importance of civic conversations lies in providing safe space for citizens to engage in conversations, which are robust, respectful, and with as much emphasis on good listening as on good conversation. It is important that citizens have the space to speak of public issues and to explore public values. Civic conversations can reflect a model of citizens' assemblies at a more local level. It is a model of participative and deliberative democracy. Working towards a common good necessitates civic conversations that are inclusive and involve as wide a range of citizens as possible.

Civic Education:

Civic conversations are also a model of civic education. The exploration of public issues, themes and values is a learning experience where every participant is both learner and teacher. To educate is to lead out from all that is narrow, restrictive and confining to wider open spaces of knowledge and practice.

> Citizens need to learn together to remake their worlds. In periods of transition, learning becomes central to our future well-being. Only if learning is placed at the centre of our experience will individuals continue to develop their capacities, institutions respond openly and imaginatively to change, and the differences within and between communities become a source for reflective understanding.
>
> Ranson, Stewart. (2018) *Education and Democratic Participation: The Making of Learning Communities* (Progressive Education). Abingdon: Routledge. Kindle Edition. p. 105.

Facilitator's Roadmap:

The facilitator is an enabler of conversation and of a learning process in which she/he/they is also a learner. The facilitator is not there to dominate but facilitate encounter, engagement, the sharing of experiences and learning. The following is a brief facilitator's roadmap.

The facilitator plays a key role in managing the group process. With skilled facilitation the group can be helped to realise its purpose and objectives and to experience positive learning outcomes. The facilitator will be required to demonstrate the following skills:

- Enable participants to draw up a group contract / ground rules.
- Ensure that the layout of space allows for maximum involvement of everyone in the group.
- Work with the group to create safe, non-threatening space.
- Ensure that no-one feels excluded, ignored or pressurised.
- Enable people to encounter each other, open up and share.
- Watch that no one individual dominates discussion.
- Transform confrontational remarks into questions.
- Keep the discussion focused on the subject.
- Encourage the group to make 'I' statements only.
- Exercise care in the time management of a group.
- Ensure that the time given is appropriate to the task.
- Resist imposing her/his/their agenda on a group.
- Avoid steering a group towards a predetermined outcome.
- Be prepared to be flexible with the group process.

A common good society is concerned to engage and educate its citizens with a view to empowering them to participate in democratic change. Such change is rooted in justice, respect, the valuing of everyone and the Earth.

Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster
18 July 2024

INTEGRATED RECONCILIATION: A COMMON GOOD VISION FOR SOCIETY

A Series of Seven Civic Conversations

By Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision* pp 27-47)

Session Outline

1	**Overview of course - Integrated Reconciliation: A Common Good Vision for Society?**	5 mins
2	**Guidelines for interaction**	5 mins
3	**Introductory exercise – ask participants to bring their chairs into a circle. As a warm-up exercise please find someone in the circle you do not know well and share 3 things about yourself? Ask each participant to introduce their paired partner to the larger group.**	10 mins
4	**Input 1 – The Common Good: An Historical Overview**	10 mins
5	**Group discussion**	15 mins
6	**Feedback**	10 mins
7	**Input 2 – The Common Good? Retaining the Question Mark**	10 mins
8	**Group discussion**	15 mins
9	**Feedback**	10 mins

This seven-session course entitled 'Integrated Reconciliation: A Common Good Vision for Society?' provides the opportunity to explore six integrated strands of reconciliation: the socio-political, the socio-economic, the socio-environmental, the socio-legal, the socio-psychological and the socio-spiritual. Consideration will be given to reflections on each reconciliation strand shared by people from Northern Ireland and the border counties who engaged with the Irish School of Ecumenics' three-year education and research project on: Is There a Common Good? There will be opportunity for group interaction and plenary discussion in each session to enable critical reflection on participants' experiences and social context.

Guidelines for Interaction

The interactive nature of this course provides opportunity for participants to have their say on each of the six strands of reconciliation and listen to the perspectives of others in the group. To ensure participants feel safe and valued as they engage in the learning process it is important that agreed guidelines for interaction are established in the form of a group contract. What would you like to see included in this contract? (E.G. Only one person talks at a time). Write guidelines on a flip-chart page as participants name them.

1. Philosophical Perspectives

- People have been reflecting and commenting on the common good for over two millennia. How the common good was understood or viewed tells us something about worldview and life experiences.
- The common good concept was popularised by the Ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle (384-322 BCE). He taught his students that a common good action contributes to the good of the community, enabling human flourishing. Further, that no individual or group should be excluded from a share in that good. A responsibility of citizenship was collective action for the common good.
- Cicero (106-43 BCE), a Roman philosopher, identified the following values as foundational to the nurturing of a common good society: kindness, goodness, justice, and generosity.
- St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), an Italian philosopher and Dominican monk, taught that in a common good society all had a share in the basic material goods of life and adhered to a code of ethical practices that were just, honourable, truthful, and trustworthy.
- John Locke (1632-1704), an English philosopher, in his *Second Treatise on Government* (1698) uses the term 'public good' to refer to interests common to all members of a political community. He identified the following as public or common goods: peace, personal security, and protection for property.
- Adam Smith (1723-1790), a Scottish economist, identified the common good with social and economic prosperity based on citizens leading responsible and industrious private lives in keeping with the laws of justice. Key to this prosperity was personal freedom so that individuals could pursue their economic interests that would be to the advantage of all. The basic premise being that a rising tide raises all boats.
- Karl Marx (1818-1883), a German philosopher and economist, challenged Adam Smith's economic theory of capitalism. He concluded that capitalist industries advanced inequalities and undermined any common good, as individual and minority rights were sacrificed to benefit the owners. A common good society, or communist society, would only come about when all property was owned in common.
- John Rawls (1921-2002), an American philosopher, in *A Theory of Justice* (1971) argues that the purpose of government is to create and maintain conditions that will benefit all. He conceived of the common good as 'basic equal liberties' that are shared by everyone.

2. Theological Perspectives

- The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) defined the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully or more easily". (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26). The Council clarified that while people may differ in their understanding of the common good that should not prevent them from working together to enhance life in all its forms.

- The World Council of Churches adopted a statement on *The Way of Just Peace*, which affirmed that "Those who seek a just peace seek the common good. On the way of just peace, different disciplines find common ground, contending world views see complementary courses of action, and one faith stands in principled solidarity with another". (10th Assembly, 2013).

- According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Jewish understanding of covenant has at its heart a common good ethical vision and practice that "…creates a moral community [and]…binds people together in a bond of mutual responsibility and care….[A] covenant of solidarity that binds all seven million of us alive today to act responsibly towards the environment, human rights and the alleviation of poverty, for the sake of generations not yet born".

  (Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, 2020, p 327).

- The Parliament of World Religions in its *Declaration towards a Global Ethic* (1993) called on world religions and spiritual traditions to commit to a common good culture by adhering to four irrevocable directives:

  1) Non-violence and respect for life
  2) Solidarity and just economic order
  3) Tolerance and a life of truthfulness
  4) Equal rights and partnership between men and women

  In 2016 the Parliament of World Religions added a fifth irrevocable directive and called on its membership to make a commitment to:

  5) A culture of sustainability and care for the Earth.

The following five reflections from people who engaged with the Irish School of Ecumenics' education and research project, are responses to the question: Is there a common good?

1. Do any of the reflections resonate with you?
2. What do they suggest about the common good?

"In 1987, about six months before I was to get married, our Baptist church on the Antrim Road was petrol bombed and the church was completely gutted. And it was the parishioners from Holy Family, the Catholic church up the street, who came down with their buckets and sponges and mops to try and help us to clear up the debris and get the church into some kind of working order. So that's just a simple act of where local people in the area were showing some kind of … I call it kindness … for the common good, you know, trying to do something, I guess, just to show that we're neighbours and this was not carried out in our name."

(Project Interviewee)

"Whenever my wife was killed [by the IRA] I moved with my young daughter into a mixed area, as I wanted her to know Catholic friends as well as Protestant friends. So, she met up with a couple of girls across the street and I got to be good friends with her father, a Roman Catholic. And on the eleventh night [of July] I was meant to be down at their house for a barbecue and I really didn't want to go because I used to go down the bonfires on the eleventh night, but this night I went over and when I got there, they'd built a bonfire in their back garden for me. No tricolour, no effigies of the Pope, and we sat around the fire, and we drank beer, and we told stories and our kids laughed and played together in the garden, little Catholic girls and little Protestant girls. It's sort of like, for me there's nothing more beautiful than the sound of kids laughing and just playing together … My friend that night in his house just realised that the eleventh night's a big thing and he just wanted to do something for me, and I thought that was lovely. I don't know if you call that the common good."

(Project Interviewee)

"I live in Springmartin, right on the peace line in West Belfast. My mum and dad and I moved there at the beginning of the Troubles, we were burned out of our house by Protestants, and we moved into a loyalist ghetto which had nothing except houses. And so, we formed a committee, we fought for years to get shops in, we fought to get play facilities in, we fought to get to see it just cleaned up. It took us years, but everybody was working for the common good of Springmartin."

(Project Interviewee)

"As somebody who is in long-term recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, who's been through the process … I almost have a duty of care to give back and that's not because I must …. I think if you've been through something then you kind of owe that learning to people who are struggling as well … The common good is giving back and wanting the best for people, that desire to want to help people be better. I think for me the common good means, to see the deficit that's in my community, to see the people that are struggling, to see the people that are hurt, to see the people that are impacted by trauma, just to see the broken … to see the people that actually need help and support. They don't need judgment, and they don't need finger-pointing, and I think we need to start seeing that we are a community."

(Project Interviewee)

"Where human beings are, there will be disagreements and differences and probably conflicts, so we need to have a frame of reference within which we resolve conflicts and I think the concept of the common good gives a decent frame of reference for that. You know, let's see how we can work together to resolve these differences and at the same time do it in a way that enriches the community within which we live."

(Project Interviewee)

- Irish philosopher, Patrick Riordan has spent meany years reflecting on the nature of the common good. In his most recent publication, he comments: "I have come to understand the concept of the common good…as open and programmatic, naming something we are still in the process of discovering."

  (P. Riordan, *Recovering Common Goods*, 2017, p 11).

- "In a democratic society people will have different views about what is the common good. So, I think we need to present a plurality of voices in as honest a way as we can."

  (Project Participant)

- "Common good is not a choice between good and a lesser good, or between good and evil. It is about finding a common better and greater good that we can agree upon, which we can't know in advance."

  (Project Participant)

- "The common good is a recognition that society as a whole works best when everyone is benefitting, and if some people benefit and others don't then I think that that damages the fabric of community."

  (Project Interviewee)

- "The common good stands in contrast to a sort of individuality that has come to dominate Western culture. So, it is a view of participation in society whereby the well-being of the whole of the community is one's goal."

  (Project Interviewee)

- We cannot always know in advance how best to actualise the common good: "… a searching and inclusive conversation needs to take place before action is attempted prematurely. In the absence of such a conversation, it is virtually certain that any action would serve those who have the dominant interests in the conversation".

  (T. Kazi, in N. Sagovsky and P. McGrail, (eds), *Together for the Common Good: Towards a National Conversation*, 2015, p xxix).

- "For me the heart of reconciliation, which feeds into the common good, is that we will do whatever we can to help heal broken relationships."

  (Project Interviewee)

1. What do you think about retaining the question mark in any exploration of the common good?
2. Can you have a common good in the absence of reconciliation?

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision*, pp 51-68)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – In a group plenary ask participants to answer the question: What do you understand by democracy? Write comments on a flip chart sheet.**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – The State of Democracy**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Overcoming the Democratic Deficit**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	20 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

"Aristotle wrote in Politics that "all communities are established for the sake of some good". - The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement provided a common framework in which political actors in this place that we call home could work together to build a common good for all of us. It gave politicians the consent of the people to strive for the common good."

(Project Presenter)

"We have a representative spectator form of democracy – citizens elect those who will determine structures and policies on behalf of everyone...It's an assumption that needs to be qualified - everywhere...I have serious doubts about the future of democracy, given the increasing evidence around the world...we can reasonably ask whether in our elections over the last twenty-five years the common good has even been on the agenda."

(Project Presenter)

"In our history we have seen how majoritarianism works in both parts of the island...There does need to be some recognition, within society and within the body politic that minorities need protected...There can be the tyranny of the majority and the tyranny of the elite."

(Project Interviewee)

- At the heart of the socio-political strand of reconciliation is the challenge to overcome the democratic deficit. This is a global challenge as strongman politics threatens democracy around the world.
- Strongman politics are expressed in Trump (USA), Modi (India), Xi Jinping (China), Putin (Russia), Erdogan (Turkey), and Orban (Hungary).
- The US and the UK see themselves as beacons of democracy in the world. But the electoral college vote in the US puts the President in power, not the votes of 'we the people'. The power of executive government formed from one party in the UK does not represent 'we the people'. Are these serious democratic defects which the people never question?
- Hannah Arendt was born into a secular Jewish family of German Jews in 1906. In 1933 she fled Germany for Paris and later went to the US where she became a US citizen. Her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in 1951 is described on the back cover as 'a chilling analysis of the conditions that led to the Nazi and Soviet regimes'.
- Arendt was concerned with learning from history and recognising the fragility of freedom, and how propaganda, scapegoating, terror, and violence, can lead to a slide into absolute domination, to a fascism and totalitarian regime.

- We are to engage in radical, ceaseless questioning to enhance our sense of political responsibility and to have an informed, discriminating judgement.
- Arendt believed that "any politics worthy of the name will embrace rather than reject human plurality, civic equality, diversity of opinion, and public debate and deliberation". (*The Origins of* Totalitarianism, 2021 edition, p 17).
- Northern Ireland has been a dysfunctional society maimed by binary identities and politics that were the visible expressions of sectarianism. Much is changing but unless sectarianism is overcome, Northern Ireland will continue with a democratic deficit, disallowing a common good and blocking a social reconciliation process.

1. How do you read the state of democracy, globally and locally?
2. How more authentic would our practice of democracy be if as citizens we engaged in radical, ceaseless questioning, critical thinking and cultivated discriminating judgement?

- From the 1970s democracy surged in the world but five decades later democratic people power has diminished and there is a retreat from democracy.
- Democracy goes a long way back in history. A Eurocentric view is that democracy began with the Greeks in Athens in 594 BCE. This democracy was about the birth of public assemblies, gatherings in which citizens freely debated, agreed, and disagreed, decided matters as equals. The Greeks called it *demokratia*, which was rule (*kratos*) by the people (*demos*).
- But the demos were male property owners. Solon, a founding figure, wanted to bring the poor into the assembly. That didn't happen!
- Democracy as citizens assemblies goes back well before Athens to Syria, Iraq and Iran. Ancient Mesopotamia was a centre of culture and commerce and was a cradle of public or citizens assemblies from 3200-1000 BCE. Two thousand years before Athens the Mesopotamians had assemblies in which the power and authority of Kings was being restrained by popular pressure from below.
- Later Athenian democracy produced Socrates who questioned everything, including democracy. For Socrates we are to question ourselves, all authority, all dogma, political and religious, all parochialism and every kind of fundamentalism or closed, exclusive system of thought, belief, and action.
- Democracy owes much to Mesopotamia, Athens, and Jerusalem. Democracy also came from the ancient Jewish tradition, not explicitly but from its moral and ethical tradition. Every individual is of dignity, worth and value, everyone is made in the image of God.
- The Hebrew prophets were committed to justice for all, for social, political, and economic justice.
- There is no democracy without justice and justice is underpinned by compassion, tenacious solidarity with all.
- Democracy is the radical civic equality of every citizen without exception, treated with dignity, value and worth.
- Francis Hutcheson was born in the north-east of Ireland and was ordained in a family succession of Presbyterian ministers. He is best known as the leading philosopher of the Scottish and Irish Enlightenments. Involved with a dissenting academy in Dublin he became Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University.

- His students became influential in American politics. His teaching was that the end of government was 'the greatest good of the greatest number', and that where government was failing and there were victims of injustices, there was the right to resist.
- This philosophy led to the American resistance to the first British Empire and shaped the radical 'We the people' line in the American Constitution, even though 'the people' were white and male.
- Revisiting this Irish-Scottish philosopher might help to overcome the democratic deficit. The 'power of the people' means the critical thinking of the people, questioning every authority structure, political manifesto and policy as to whether the greatest good of the greatest number is the objective.
- The 'power of the people' means that politicians and political systems are accountable to the people. Authentic democracy is participative and deliberative, where power belongs and is exercised by all the people.
- Democracy is where people and politicians work together for the common good, and where there is human plurality, civic equality, diversity of opinion and public debate and deliberation.
- Democracy is where every citizen is of dignity, value and worth, where social justice is for all, without exclusion or exception, and the whole community is committed in compassionate solidarity.

1. What do you think of the Mesopotamian, Greek and Hebrew roots of democracy? Do each provide any inspiration for modern democracy?
2. Socrates taught that we are to question everything and be critical thinkers. Are we too lazy, passive, lacking critical responsibility?
3. What strikes you about Francis Hutcheson's philosophy in relation to the practice of democracy today?

Feedback and Plenary Reflection

Do you see any connection between democracy, the common good and social reconciliation?

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision* pp 71-100)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – The large group will be divided into smaller groups of 4-6 people.** **Each small group will be given a large sheet of flipchart paper and a marker. In the centre of the sheet ask someone in the group to write the word poverty.** **Each group has 5 minutes to record on the sheet words or phrases that come to mind when they see the word poverty.** **The large group will reform.** **A volunteer from each group will choose 3 words / phrases from the sheet to feedback to the larger group.**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Understanding Poverty**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	20 mins
4	**Feedback**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Socio-Economic Reconciliation for the Common Good**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

1. Globally

- The UN 4th World Conference of Women produced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was endorsed by189 countries. It affirmed that poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It listed poverty's various manifestations, which included:
  - lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods;
  - hunger and malnutrition;
  - ill health;
  - limited or lack of access to education and other basic services;
  - increased morbidity and mortality from illness;
  - homelessness and inadequate housing;
  - unsafe environments;
  - social discrimination and exclusion; and
  - a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life.

  (United Nations, 1995a, para. 47).

- The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has as its first goal ending global poverty in all its forms. In 2015 every country in the world signed up to the 16 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include reducing inequalities, combatting climate change, and protecting our natural environment. There is recognition that poverty poses a key barrier to the implementation of the other SDGs in developing countries.

- The SDGs reflect the new understanding of human development pioneered by Indian economist, Amartya Sen. His human capabilities approach recognises that improving a country's wealth does not ensure human wellbeing. A strategy is needed also to develop people's abilities through access to better education, improved healthcare, and the necessary resources for sustainable development. Sen urges governments to focus on people and their development and not on Gross Domestic product (GDP).

2. Locally (Northern Ireland)

- Poverty is relative to context. According to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in 2021-22, 13% of people in Northern Ireland were living in absolute poverty, and 16% were living in relative poverty. To cite an example, a couple with no children and an income of £314 per week or less were deemed to be living in absolute poverty. If the same couple had an income of £339 per week they fell within the relative poverty threshold.

  (NISRA, *The Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report 2021-22*, 2023, p 3).

- The Consumer Council NI Household Expenditure Tracker shows that after bills and living expenses have been paid, those living in poverty have less than £19 per week left for discretionary spending.

(The Consumer Council, 2023, p 2).

- According to the Trussell Trust, food bank usage in Northern Ireland has increased by 141% in the last five years. "Food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Northern Ireland distributed 81,084 emergency food parcels between 1 April 2022 to 31st March 2023, including 35,334 parcels for children. This is the most parcels that the network in Northern Ireland has ever distributed in a financial year and represents a 29% increase from the same period in 2021/22".

(The Trussell Trust, *Emergency food parcel distribution in Northern Ireland : April 2022 – March 2023*, p 1).

- The Northern Ireland Audit Office figures indicate that around one in five children in Northern Ireland are living in relative poverty (before housing costs), and between 7 and 9 per cent are living in low-income households that cannot afford basic goods and essential activities.

(*Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*, 12 March 2024, p 10).

3. Locally (Republic of Ireland)

- According to the Social Justice Ireland 2023 report:
  - 13.1% of people are living with poverty and more than a third of this figure (5.8%) are working families.
  - When rental costs in the private market are deducted from income, a staggering 41% of people are at risk of poverty.
  - There has been a 62% increase within the year of older people living in poverty, which demonstrates the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on those with fixed incomes.
  - Finally, the report confirms that 15.1% of children in the Republic of Ireland are at risk of poverty.

(Healy et al, *Social Justice Matters: 2023 Guide to a Fairer Irish Society*, p 34).

The following statements were made by participants on the *Is There A Common Good?* project in relation to poverty. Please read them and discuss the questions that follow.

"I worry that there is this narrative that says, 'Well you know, we can't really touch rich people because they are the wealth-creators for the rest of us'. The UK is something like the fifth or sixth wealthiest country in the world and we have people who can't afford food! There's something wrong there. But we've got ourselves into that narrative which says, 'We can't really do it any differently. We can't afford to help those people, we can't afford to give them more Universal Credit, we can't afford handouts and anyway sure, people who are on benefits, they're swinging the lead, they're playing the system'."

(Project Interviewee)

"We know there are a lot of people who live on the breadline, for want of a better word, and it's about seeing how you can progress that and make life better for them. But you know the term 'poverty' has been bandied about all my life and I think of poverty entirely differently. I don't look at it from a money point of view.... There are different elements to poverty. For instance, it's about being powerless, it's about having somebody else make decisions for you, and it's about having no voice. We have politicians who talk for us, but they never talk to us, and it's about changing all that."

(Project Interviewee)

"Poverty is a geographical issue. The further you are from the seats of power, the more you are impacted by poverty, for example, places in the north furthest away from Belfast and places in the south furthest away from Dublin. The border is furthest away from both! We also have Northern Ireland furthest away from Westminster with water as the divide."

(Project Participant)

"One of my daughters is on a zero-hour contract and is having to arrange childcare but not knowing whether she is going to get work or not, and it is actually ending up costing her money and you know, not being able to have any real family life because you don't know if you're gonna work, when you're gonna work and it's really just like slave labour. It's absolutely obscene. I feel as an employer you should be ashamed to treat someone that way. What does that do to somebody's sense of value and even mental health or whatever, apart from the financial strains?"

(Project Interviewee)

"... Disadvantage is based on income, not based on your community background ... If you want to participate in a society, it usually requires time and money, and if you have neither then participating in decision-making in civic society becomes much more difficult."

(Project Presenter)

Questions for the group discussion:

1. Do any of the above statements on poverty resonate with you?
2. What do you think are the contributory factors that lead to people living in poverty?
3. How does living with poverty impact human well-being? What do you think are the consequences for children?

- Social, economic, and educational poverty is a block to reconciliation and denies those living with poverty the dignity and opportunities that are their right by virtue of their humanity.
- Kathleen Lynch, an Irish academic and Commissioner for Human Rights and Equality in the Republic of Ireland, describes the impact the neo-capitalist system has had over the last 40 years.

  "It institutionalizes and legitimates class-based economic inequalities, frequently in deeply racialized and gendered ways. It builds on and consolidates pre-existing hierarchical, patriarchal, and racial divisions of wealth and power, thereby producing and reproducing eliminable forms of human suffering. Capitalism also contributes to a corrosion of democracy and community, the encouragement of environmentally destructive patterns of consumption, and, in a world of nation states, a fuelling of militarism and imperialism."
  (Lynch, *Care and Capitalism: Why Affective Equality Matters for Social* Justice, 2022, p 1).
- Participants on this programme pointed to the growing gap between the wealthy and everybody else. This has resulted in: a detachment among the upper-class; an anxiety among a previously secure middle class, as the cost of living rises and jobs are more at risk with technological advances; and an alienated working class who see no way out of poverty.
- A 2023 Pivotal Public Policy Forum NI report on the connection between reconciliation and deprivation underlines the lack of sustained economic peace dividends in Derry/Londonderry, Strabane, and north and west Belfast. These areas are the most materially disadvantaged parts of Northern Ireland, while living most directly at the sharp end of the complex legacies of the Troubles.
  (A. Watt, *Reconciliation and Deprivation: Twin Challenges for Northern Ireland*, 2023, p 3).
- Healy et al raise crucial questions that challenge those in power and society at large to take responsibility for ending poverty.

  1. "How is it that we cannot imagine a society and economy based on a system other than what is already in place, which is just a human constructed system for organising economic activity?"

2. "Why is it so hard for political leaders to envision an alternative, one that can deliver a vibrant economy, thriving communities, affordable housing, access to healthcare when required, access to education for all, transparent and good governance, and sustainability?"

(Healy *et al*, *Social Justice Matters: 2023 Guide to a Fairer Irish Society*, p 10).

- One project participant critiqued the neo-liberal form of capitalism that predominates in the West, which puts profit before people and creates a virtue out of purchasing power. He asked, "Can we have capitalism without consumerism or capitalism that gives dividends to the poor?"
- Another perspective that had support from quite a few who engaged with the programme was the idea of a basic income, or citizen's income, to replace the benefit system, with the aim of eliminating poverty and ensuring a more egalitarian society. The thinking was that this would transform the welfare system in a way that made capitalism work for everyone. Also, the change in language from 'benefit' to 'salary' recognises the right of each person to have a share in the common-wealth.
- One of those interviewed for the project emphasised the importance of capacity building to create a fairer and more resilient society. "The Shankill certainly is a deprived area, but the Shankill is not short of resources … I think the common good for us economically has more to do with aspiration, it's more to do with believing that they are worth building a future with … It's about capacity-building…. Walk up the Shankill any time and it does not reflect prosperity. You know, is it 68 vacant sites? There's nothing aspirational about it. So, economically it's about investment."

(Project Interviewee)

- Some of those interviewed held that institutional and structural change was needed to ensure a fairer and more viable economic system. It would involve the reallocation and rationalising of resources, to improve provision and efficiency.

- "Is the NHS really the NHS when you have waiting lists which are 300,000 - 400,000 people in a small place like this? Is it really delivery of free health at the point of contact when you have to wait seven or eight years for an operation? We've far too many hospitals in Northern Ireland. Can we really afford to have a hospital, of some description, every 20 miles or so whenever, if you take the equivalent size of land mass or population in Great Britain, you might have three hospitals and that's it? There are all these Health and Social Care Trusts for a country our size, 1.9 million people. Do we need seven or eight? I would've thought one would do very well."

  (Project Interviewee)

- "I was asked once upon a time to have a look at how policing is divided up in different parts of the UK, when we were re-designing policing over here. At that stage we had 39 police sub-divisions in Northern Ireland. I went over to Devon and Cornwall, which is one police area in England, and they had two sub-divisions, one was called Devon, and one was called Cornwall! You know, far more efficient, far more effective. You do not need 39 leaders of policing. So, I think the cost of bureaucracy here detracts from delivering front-line services which is the most important aspect of policing."

  (Project Interviewee)

- Political, religious and community leadership have a role in helping people to prepare for change by supporting the opportunities to create a more equal, cost-effective, inclusive, and reconciled society.

1. In the process of restructuring society, can ways be found to ensure that there is a levelling up so that the peace dividend provides those marginalised and kept in poverty with the means to live with dignity?
2. What changes would you like to see to advance the creation of a more equal, cost effective, inclusive and reconciled society?

Feedback and Plenary Discussion

Can we ask the wealthy in our society to pay higher taxes to support those most in need? Scotland's progressive tax system does just that. Or do you have other suggestions?

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision*, pp 105- 132)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise: One of the contributors to the 'Is There A Common Good?' project stated that "Human rights join us together as our place of common good?" What do you think this statement means? Do you agree?**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Reconciliation and Human Rights: Core Foundations of the Common Good**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Human Rights in Northern Ireland Post Brexit**	15 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

- A common good society must find a way to hold together the protection of human rights and the pursuit of reconciliation. To put it another way, human rights and reconciliation are two sides of the one common good coin. To deny their interconnectedness is to undermine and weaken the pursuit of a common good society.
- We are more aware of our interconnectedness, interdependence and shared responsibility for the world and the people who inhabit it. The human rights and reconciliation discourses underline this connectedness and create the space to identify local and global responsibilities and interventions.
- Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, delivered the fourth Annual Human Rights Lecture at the Irish Human Rights Commission in 2009, to mark International Human Rights Day. In his speech he grappled with the human capacity to cause immense suffering and challenged his listeners to recognise our "common human belonging" and become "allies in the great work of 'saving nations and peoples'".
- Three years later, in 2012, President Michael D. Higgins delivered the Annual Human Rights Lecture, and he outlined the complexities surrounding human rights discourse and the need for reconciliation at the national level and the global level.
- President Higgins underlined the importance of pursuing the UDHR vision of universality, inclusivity, and the indivisibility of human rights, with a humility that recognises the need to secure "accommodation for each other's narratives in the contemporary world".
- According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself [sic] and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services".
  (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 25).
- Protecting human rights nationally and globally is a fundamental challenge for world leaders, human rights institutions, and NGOs, as well as local governments, religious bodies, civic organisations and concerned citizens. It is integral to the reconciliation process.

- The Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 makes for grim reading as it outlines the litany of human rights abuses in 2022:

  "…from Russian President Vladimir Putin's deliberate attacks on civilians in Ukraine and Xi Jinping's open-air prison for the Uyghurs in China to the Taliban's putting millions of Afghans at risk of starvation."

  (T. Hassan, *A New Model for Global Leadership in Human Rights*, 2023, p 1).

- The most recent atrocities in the Middle East, with mounting civilian casualties, many of them women and children, underlines the importance of human rights frameworks but, equally, the responsibility of the international community to hold those responsible for human rights abuses.

- There is a prescient need to strengthen the global human rights system so it can respond proactively and effectively to flagrant disregard for human life and human rights. Otherwise, those perpetrating crimes against civilians, including paramilitary and state forces, will continue to act with impunity, irrespective of the human cost.

Please read the following statements and discuss the questions that follow.

"What human rights does is provide a framework in which you can build trust. Human rights frameworks of themselves don't automatically engender the trust but they can provide a framework or bulwark in which you can operate."

(Contributor to the '*Is There A Common Good*?' project)

"A common good society is one where people feel safe, where they're not hungry, where they feel valued, where they have a good standard of living. Whatever the system of government, it is where people have their rights and freedoms, and they don't feel vulnerable. We must legislate for a common good society".

(Contributor to the '*Is There A Common Good*?' project)

Former President of Ireland and Former UN Human Rights Commissioner, Mary Robinson, reflected after the death of her friend, Inez McCormack, a human rights' advocate in Northern Ireland:

"Experience taught Inez that change could not be delivered through well-intentioned promises for the future. Change required timetables, outcomes, and a keen awareness of power relationships. As she said: "Those who **have** can always argue that tomorrow is the right time for change. For the **have-nots** today is not soon enough".

(Robinson, 'Inez McCormack Obituary', *The Guardian*, 2013).

1. What is the connection between reconciliation and human rights?
2. How does change come about?

- One of the contributors to the project reflected on her hopes for a common good Northern Ireland that has human rights as its foundation:

  "My dream for Northern Ireland would be a place that feels safe for all who live here; a place that is comfortable in its own 'skin'; a place where all our people feel at ease with one another; a place where my grandchildren wish to live rather than leave – where their basic needs and human rights would be upheld. That is, a place where each is given equal opportunity, education, housing, a good health system, and future employment. A place where we can listen and learn from those who are different from us."

- The *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* has human rights and equality safeguards built into it. They include:

  - The right of free political thought.
  - The right to freedom and expression of religion.
  - The right to pursue democratically national and political aspirations.
  - The right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means.
  - The right to freely choose one's place of residence.
  - The right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender, or ethnicity.
  - The right to freedom from sectarian harassment.
  - The right of women to full and equal political participation.

  (*The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement*, 1998, p. 16).

- The Human Rights and Equality Commissions in Northern Ireland, established post *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* (1998), have a responsibility to ensure that government and other public bodies seek to protect "the mutual respect, the civil liberties and religious liberties of everyone in the community".

  (*The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement*, 1998, p 16).

- The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) has agreed a framework to ensure 'parity of esteem' and fairness when it comes to adjudicating between competing rights. This was explained to project participants by the then Chief Commissioner:

  "There isn't a hierarchy of rights. For instance, if one group wishes to march through or protest in a community that does not want that protest to happen, you have got the right to freedom of assembly on the one hand, and the right to private and family life on the

other. The framework for managing competing rights is about recognising the level of the right. For example, in relation to freedom of assembly we look at: can you assemble freely elsewhere? Is there a particular reason why you want to march or protest in this area? How much of a disturbance is this? How long will it last? The framework allows you to make proportionate decisions."

(Chief Commissioner Les Allamby, April 2021).

- The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) was set up as a:

  "…quasi-independent public body sponsored by the Northern Ireland Executive Office, with a specific charge for 'providing protection against discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, race, religion and political opinion, sex and sexual orientation.' …ECNI works to ensure that equality of opportunity is mainstreamed by public authorities in their policymaking, policy implementation, and policy review."

  (J. Waller, *A Troubled Sleep: Risk and Resilience in Contemporary Northern Ireland*, 2021, p 190).

- The Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) was established in the Republic of Ireland in July 2001 under the Human Rights Commission Act 2000. It was dissolved in 2014 and replaced by the Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), established by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. This is an independent statutory body to protect and promote human rights and equality in the Republic of Ireland.

- The *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* 1998 envisaged the establishment of a Joint Committee of representatives from the two Human Rights Commissions on the island of Ireland. The purpose of this forum was to consider human rights issues on the island of Ireland. The first official meeting of the Joint Committee took place in November 2001.

- Post Brexit, concern has been expressed about what this will mean for human rights legislation and protection in Northern Ireland and the possibility of widening gaps in rights across the island. The NIHRC, who are tasked with protecting equality and human rights in a post-Brexit Northern Ireland, have confirmed:

  "Under the Windsor Framework (formerly the Ireland/NI Protocol) to the Withdrawal Agreement reached with the EU, the UK Government is committed to ensuring that the protections currently in place in Northern Ireland for the rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity provisions set out in the chapter of the same name in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement will not be reduced as a result of the UK leaving the EU."

  (NIHRC, *Human Rights After Brexit*, 2021).

- Another commitment in the *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* and the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was the creation of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The NIHRC produced a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland in 2008 but lack of political consensus meant it remained in cold storage.

- To progress a bill, and following commitments made in the New Decade New Approach Agreement (2020), an Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights was established and, in 2022, it published a report summarising its findings.

- The majority of those who engaged in the research process highlighted the following as potential advantages of a Bill of Rights. It could:
  - Enhance human rights protections.
  - Act as a transitional justice measure and support peace and reconciliation.
  - Act as a safeguard underpinning legislation and policy.
  - Help support political stability by removing certain matters from political decision.
  - Facilitate political accountability and good governance and strengthen democracy.
  - Play an important role in the face of wider change.
  - Act as an educative tool and support a rights-based culture.

  (Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights, 2022, p. 32).

- The *Annual Report of the NIHRC and the ECNI on the* 'Implementation of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework 2022-2023' recommends:

  "...that the NI Office implements the UK Government commitment to legislate for a Bill of Rights for NI, as set out in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement....; and ensure that there are additional measures within a Bill of Rights to strengthen NI equality laws, address gaps in equality legislation and protect equality and human rights in a post-Brexit context."

  (NIHRC and the ECNI, 2023, p, 28).

As part of this education and research project participants were invited to share their perspectives on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The following comments provide a flavour of the responses shared. Read the reflections and discuss:

1. How might a Bill of Rights support peace and reconciliation?

"The challenge is to take human rights back to the community and give local people, especially those living in deprived areas, the power and support they need to have a say in what matters most to them –housing, health, jobs, and education. Ask them what that would like to see included in a Bill of Rights to improve their lives and social conditions."

"There is a perception in some Protestant, unionist, loyalist (PUL) communities that a Bill of Rights would undermine their rights and benefit the Catholic, republican, nationalist (CRN) community. It's a narrative, maybe, that some of them are being fed. A conversation is needed at grass-roots level that a human right is a right for all humans, it's not a zero-sum game but a win-win for everybody."

Feedback and Plenary Discussion?

How might a Bill of Rights facilitate political accountability and strengthen democracy?

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision* pp 139-169)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise: Each group of 4-6 people will be given a flip chart page and marker. Ask someone to act as scribe and write the word Climate Crisis in the centre of the page. Ask members in the group to say what comes to mind when they see the word for the scribe to write the word or phrase on the sheet. Feedback two words or phrases from each group to larger group.**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Mending the Earth: A Challenge for the World**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	20 mins
4	**Feedback**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Socio-Environmental Reconciliation: Local Context**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	20 mins
7	**Feedback**	10 mins

- The Global North, since the Industrial Revolution and through colonial expansionism, has wrought most damage to our shared planet and carries primary responsibility for reparation and repair.
- The impact of colonialism and the consequences for climate change mitigations in former colonies has still to be understood in the Global North, which has benefitted from centuries of colonialism.
- International climate change conferences have taken place in different world locations since 1998. Some progress on climate change mitigation, adaption and finance has been made in more recent conferences.
- A landmark agreement between world leaders and their representatives was the Paris Agreement in 2015, adopted at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21), which was supported by USA and China, the two largest polluters.
- A commitment was agreed to keep the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with a view to limiting it to 1.5°C by the end of this century. This was to avoid far more serious weather conditions, including frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves, and excessive rainfall.
- There has been recognition, since the Paris conference, that responsibility lies with countries in the Global North to make generous reparation for their colonisation of the Global South. This includes their extraction of natural resources to enhance imperial coffers, and their pollution of the planet to grow the Western economy.
- The majority of those living in the Global South have a small carbon footprint, yet they suffer most from climate damage, as they are least resilient to extreme weather and loss of biodiversity.
- It is for this reason that COP27, which took place in Egypt in 2022, established a new fund to help victims suffering loss and damages because of global warming. Whatever arrangements are agreed, monies given must be reparation payments and not loans.
- Financial reparation from affluent nations in the form of a climate fund to help vulnerable countries in the Global South would go some way to reconciling relationships with other peoples, and the environment. It would contribute to both eco-justice and the rebuilding of trust.

- We have known for some time that the climate crisis would amplify conflicts and societal problems. In 1974, the CIA produced a study on 'climatological research as it pertains to intelligence problems' which warned of '… the emergence of a new era of weird weather, leading to political unrest and mass migration (which, in turn, would cause more unrest).'
(A. Bell, 'Sixty years of climate change warnings: the signs that were missed (and ignored)', *The Guardian*, 5th July 2021).

- Scientists throughout the world reached the same conclusion as the CIA and tried to persuade world leaders that mitigatory efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could prevent future military interventions.

- In 1992 the Union of Concerned Scientists warned that humanity faced a stark choice between spending its resources on war and violence or on preventing catastrophic environmental damage. The report was signed by 1,700 scientists, including Nobel Prize winners in the sciences.

- In 2017 the warning was reissued, and this time signed by 15,000 scientists: it concluded that the state of the world was even worse than before.
(A. Ghosh, 'The Perception Gap', in Thunberg, G. (ed.) *The Climate Book*. 2022, p 124).

- Going on current trends the numbers forced to migrate could be in the region of 1.2 billion by 2050, according to Global Hydrologist, Taikan Oki.
(T. Oki, 'Water Shortages', in Thunberg, G. (ed.) *The Climate Book*, 2022, p 187).

- Instead of accepting responsibility for the climate crisis and providing hospitality to those suffering its devastating impact, rich nations are spending money on defences. Military spending increases, as does the possibility of civil unrest and conflict over scarcer resources.

- If monies spent on military budgets in the Global North, estimated at almost 2 trillion dollars in 2020, were redirected to a hospitality fund to support migrants, or a reparation fund to enable vulnerable countries to become more resilient, the world would be a safer place.

- It would show also that the geopolitical focus had shifted from a struggle for dominance and military defence to a commitment to reconciliation, to saving the lives of people in all places, and to ensuring a future for children everywhere.

"Acknowledging the ways in which we have benefitted from the fossil fuel industry and from global injustice and accepting that there is a moral responsibility on the part of our minority privileged nations is a necessary step to experiencing global empathy. We need to put pressure on our government and on corporations to do the right thing in terms of climate justice."

(Project Participant)

"A reduction in military expenditure would immediately reduce carbon emissions significantly, given that militarisation does more damage ecologically than any other human endeavour."

(K. Gould, 'The Ecological Costs of Militarization', *Peace Review 19(3)*, 2007, p 331).

"The greater the international cooperation on decarbonisation and building defences to protect vulnerable countries, the more mass migration would become less likely."

(Project Participant)

1. What are your thoughts on these three quotes?
2. Socio- environmental reconciliation has to do with eco-justice. Why are world leaders in the Global North slow to heed scientists' warnings that environmental reparations with countries in the Global South are an ethical imperative?
3. If there was greater awareness of the environmental consequences of increased militarisation would that increase public pressure to reduce the military budget in the West?

- The UK Climate Change Act 2008 has a net-zero emissions target by 2050 but climate change policy is a devolved matter. In 2009 the Scottish Parliament adopted a Climate Change (Scotland) Act setting out its targets in keeping with the UK commitment. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 set interim targets for 2020, 2030 and 2040.
- The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 has a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050. However, methane gas is only subject to a 46% reduction by 2050, because of lobbying by the intensive farming sector. This will have a negative impact on Northern Ireland's ability to decarbonise.
- The Act also commits the Northern Ireland Assembly to appointing a Climate Change Commissioner, a Just Transition Commissioner, soil quality and biodiversity targets, and a Just Transition Fund to support efforts to enhance biodiversity, develop healthy ecosystems, reduce greenhouse gases, and achieve renewable energy goals.
- To meet targets set, what is now required are departmental Climate Action Plans with structures in place to ensure effective monitoring and accountability. Departments will need to work together to meet the scale of reductions to greenhouse gas emissions needed within the timescale.
- President Higgins signed the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021* into law on 23rd July 2021, committing the Republic of Ireland to net-zero emissions by 2050, in keeping with its international and EU climate commitments.
- The Republic of Ireland's first carbon budget came into effect in April 2022. It stipulates the maximum amount of greenhouse gases the state can emit over a specific period to ensure a 51% reduction in emissions on 2018 levels by 2030.
- The Republic of Ireland's Climate Action Plan (2023) outlines the emissions reductions necessary in each sector of the economy by 2030 with accompanying action plans. Sectors covered include Electricity, Transport, Buildings, Industry/Enterprise, Agriculture and Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry.
- Agriculture accounts for one third of the Republic of Ireland's emissions and dairy farms produce up to three times more greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions than other farming sectors. The Social Justice Ireland report asks why then the dairy sector has been earmarked for expansion (Healey *et al.*, *Social Justice Matters: 2023 guide to a fairer Irish Society*, 2023, p 268). Surely this will be counter-productive in achieving the carbon budget target?

- The Social Justice Ireland report recommends prioritising social investment and outlines core priorities for the government in implementing the necessary changes needed. These include:

  1. Retraining and support for those communities who will be most impacted by the loss of employment related to the move away from fossil fuels.
  2. Support and investment in the circular economy with regional strategies and targets.
  3. Investment in the deep retrofitting of homes and community facilities.
  4. The provision of community energy advisors and community energy programmes.
  5. Investment in renewable energy schemes.
  6. Policies to eliminate energy poverty.
  7. Investment in a quality, accessible and well-connected public transport network.

  (Healey *et al.*, 2023, p. 282).

Read the following statements and discuss the questions that follow.

"Approximately 30% of our greenhouse emissions in Northern Ireland are caused by agriculture.... Water pollution is a big problem for agriculture. Lough Neagh's one of the most polluted waterways in Europe and that is coming predominantly from agriculture, run-off from all the farms around the lough. That's because we're over-producing nutrients, we've too much slurry and not enough land to put it on because we're breeding so many animals and we have to deal with that waste … There's biodiversity as well, in terms of the number of species that we've lost. Again, that's down to the monocultures and hedges being taken out and all of that. And we're not farming our soil properly and we're losing all the nutrient value out of it, we're losing all the fungi and stuff in it. And there's evidence that that means our food isn't as nutritious as it should be, so the nutrients that you used to get from broccoli you're not now getting the equivalent nutrient values. Different farming techniques can improve the nutrient value and those systems that are more sustainable like no-dig or min-till agricultural systems are better for the climate as well as the soil."

(Project Interviewee)

"It is vital that we take care of the environment … We need clean air; we need clean water … We need to protect bees; I think people don't understand just how vital bees are to our survival. Over-fishing's another thing …Waste disposal, huge pig farms which spoil the countryside for everyone and aren't that good for our health, battery hens…. I'm very much interested in the rights of nature people, but I can see that it would take some persuading for some people to think that trees and rivers have rights. If you think that a river has the right to flow freely then you might stop polluting it. It's just so important that our environment is protected."

(Project Interviewee)

"There's a guy in the Walled Garden in Helen's Bay who is feeding 40 families from less than an acre of land from his veg box scheme. We should be able to do much better than we're doing because most farms in Northern Ireland are small farms. There is an opportunity here actually to begin to make them more economically viable in a sustainable way."

(Project Interviewee)

"Can we achieve the common good? Can we save the planet? The answer is yes, it's up to us, but this will only be achieved when we recognise our interdependence with nature."

(Project Participant)

1. What are your reactions to the above statements?
2. How do you think farmers in Northern Ireland / Ireland might be supported to adopt more sustainable farming practices, including transitioning from dairy to other types of farming?

(From Is There A Common Good: Living Towards the People's Vision, pp 171-196)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise - In an open plenary invite participants to respond to the question: Is engaging the recent past experience of conflict in Northern Ireland necessary for reconciliation?**	5 mins
2	**Input 1 – Confronting the Legacies**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	20 mins
4	**Feedback**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Legacies in Historical Context. Ask participants to read the timeline. When finished, share input 2 with them.**	15 mins
6	**Group discussion**	20 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	10 mins

"The burden of memory is a heavy one. We seem to be fighting for control of memories. How the past is perceived in communities, how it is used by politicians needs to be critically reviewed... For a better future, all sides of history must be taught accurately and not as a quarry from which to get stones to throw."

(Project Presenter)

"Dealing with the past remains a difficult issue with which politicians and civic society struggle. The importance of understanding the past by engaging with history through all-age learning programmes is important."

(Project Participant)

"There's been a lot of hurt. There's been huge hurt in border society, and I understand that and we're all part of the story. We can say we've nothing to do with it, we all are part of it in one way or another. Whatever side we came down on, whether we were fighting for freedom, or our families were in the security forces, we're all connected in some way and that has had a major effect. On its own, there's not a border dweller if they told you the truth that's not marked by 30+ years of conflict and even this peace that we're in, this fragile enough peace really, that we're in."

(Project Interviewee)

"When I was in the police, we were fighting the IRA because they were involved in a campaign to overturn the government and they were nothing but terrorists. And yet when you get to talking with folk and you see the bigger picture and you listen to the Irish history from the early part of the 20th century and you humanise and speak to the individual, you then see that there are two stories or there are two parts to every story...As you get older you become more reflective and more questioning of things learnt in the past."

(Project Interviewee)

- The socio-psychological strand of reconciliation may deal with issues of identity and belonging. They are important but this strand has to do with more than issues of identity expressed through flags, emblems, or patriotism as my nation right or wrong, my nation.
- Conflictual societies and contested societies, countries with histories of war and violence, have pasts to deal with, traumas to work through and new futures to build. There is often no agreement about the past.
- There may never be an agreed narrative of the past, but we can begin to understand the contested narratives. We can either remain prisoners of our own narratives or begin to listen to the diverse narratives of others with empathy and understanding.

- At the beginning of the decade of centenaries there was concern that the centennial events of 1912-1922 would become violent. That didn't happen because a lot of people did careful planning, and we were well served by historians with access to documents and information not available before the decade.
- We struggle to deal with the past. Significantly it was through the arts that the beginning and end of the Irish Civil War was marked in Dublin at the National Concert Hall and the Garden of Remembrance in 2022 and 2023. Families and relatives from both sides of the war were present and integrated.
- A template was developed in 2010-2011 called Ethical and Shared Remembering and became influential. There were five strands to the template for ethical remembering:
  1 Remembering in context
  2 Remembering the whole decade
  3 Remembering the future
  4 Remembering ethically
  5 Remembering together
- It was adapted from Irish philosopher Richard Kearney who borrowed from his teacher Paul Ricoeur. Remembering ethically had a three-strand framework.
  1 Narrative hospitality
  2 Narrative plurality
  3 Narrative flexibility
- Hospitality is the openness and willingness to engage with the different stories, the stories of others, and the openness to recognise that as new information comes to light, our historical narratives change and will keep changing. Nothing is final or fixed in history, hence the need for narrative flexibility.
- There are two additional perspectives. They are:
  1 Narrative enlargement
  2 Narrative repair
- Narrative enlargement is about placing our stories and narratives in a wider and larger context. Irish history cannot be understood apart from European imperial history and the partition of Ireland was part of violent partitions happening at the same time elsewhere in Europe.

- Narrative repair is about recovering lost and silenced voices from our painful past. Many are the voices of women, often made invisible and their voices repressed. Narrative repair is not about denying the horrors of the past and pretending that unjust and ethical attitudes, behaviours and systems were not at work. It is ensuring that unethical systems and cultures and violence never happen again. We repair by building a more ethical society and community.

1 Reflect on some of the quotations from those who participated in the *Is There A Common Good?* Project. How do you feel about their perspectives?

2 Do you think the Ethical and Shared Remembering template, including the two additions, offers a framework for dealing with the past?

Historical Contextual Timeline	
1800	Act of Union abolished Irish Parliament in College Green and established the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.
1829	Catholic Emancipation in Ireland and Britain and Emancipation for Jews also.
1869	William Gladstone introduced a Bill for the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. Became reality on 1 January 1871. Gladstone was dismantling the Protestant Ascendancy.
1896	Gladstone introduced the first Home Rule Bill for Ireland. Rejected by House of Commons.
1893	Gladstone introduced second Home Rule Bill. Passed by Commons but Rejected by House of Lords. Nationalism and Unionism organising politically and tensions increasing.
1903	Wyndham Land Purchase Act led to transfer of land to Irish tenants.
1912	Liberal Government dependent on Irish Nationalists in a hung Parliament, introduced a third Home Rule Bill. Ulster Solemn League and Covenant signed and pledged to use any means necessary to defeat the Bill.
1913	Formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteers.
1914	Ulster Volunteer Force gun running to Larne, Donaghadee and Bangor. Irish Volunteers gun running to Howth, and to Newcastle in County Wicklow. Ireland on the brink of civil war.
1914	WWI began and third Home Rule Bill was passed but put into cold storage until the war was over.
1916	Battle of Somme became the blood sacrifice of Ulster loyalists.
	Easter Rising became the blood sacrifice of Irish nationalists.
1918	End of WWI. General election and Sinn Fein landslide followed by first Dail Eireann and beginning of War of Independence. Truce in July 1921.
1919	Paris Peace Conference with the hope for self-determination for small nations. But the four big powers in Paris, - the USA, France, Britain, and Italy - carved up the world in their own imperial interests.
1920	Government of Ireland Act partitioned Ireland, six northern counties to become Northern Ireland and twenty-six counties to become the Free State.
1921	Northern Ireland came into being in May 1921 with a seemingly untouchable Protestant majority of 66:33.
1922	Anglo-Irish Treaty divided southern Ireland into pro and anti-Treaty forces and Civil War lasted until 1923.
1923	The Free State and Northern Ireland began the task of state building. Both states were born in violence, and both were confessionally based, a Catholic state and a Protestant state.
1969	After sporadic violence since partition in Northern Ireland, the most recent phase is usually dated to 1969 and lasted for thirty years with over 3,600 dead and up to 40 thousand injured, many permanently.
1998	The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement provided a framework for a peace process.

- There are historical facts and there is always interpretation, and we need to be critically aware of the difference. We have long abandoned the objectivist illusion. Dealing with the past means digging into historical context. Trauma, suffering, and pain have an historico-political context stretching back at least five centuries.
- We need civic conversations on Irish history and on the litany of atrocities and violence during which many of us have lived. We need to really talk about the past, share the complex, painful and plural narratives with a readiness to hear all sides of a past that we might rather forget.
- This requires an openness to listen to the voices of lasting suffering, to the voices of perpetrators, victims, survivors and passive but complicit bystanders. This also needs to include inter-generational conversations.
- There is a litany of atrocities and an inventory of legacies about which we can talk together, educate ourselves and engage with one another. We can identify them. Questions to critically explore them are:

    1 Why did this happen?
    2 Where does responsibility lie?
    3 What was the purpose?
    4 What were the consequences?
    5 What impact did the atrocity have on people's lives?
    6 What did the atrocity do to community relations?
    7 What was the impact on politics and political and social dynamics?
    8 What are the legacies and the impact on the future?

- We need to critically explore the experiences and narratives that conditioned the individuals and group actors, politicians, republicans, loyalists, army, police, and we, the people.

    1 How were each of these conditioned and shaped by the complex historical, social, cultural, religious, and ideological narratives?
    2 Where was each coming from and what influenced them?
    3 What motivated involvement and what drove their activities and action, and the underlying attitudes?

4 What were the values that underpinned their role and activity?
5 Why did we act and behave as we did?
6 Have the years and life-reflection changed our perspectives?
7 Are there regrets?
8 Are there attitudes, behaviours, actions, and values that we wish could have been different?

- What were the impact and consequences of political violence? What was:

1 The psychological impact?
2 The spiritual and moral impact?
3 The economic impact?
4 The environmental impact?
5 The impact on women?
6 The impact on children?
7 The social impact?
8 What is the future for each of the above? Do we have a future, a way out of no way?

- Truth-telling is an important component of justice. Many victims/survivors would be satisfied if they knew the truth of what happened to their loved ones.
- Is there a relationship between justice and forgiveness? Religious communities deal a lot with liturgical forgiveness and a very individualistic or private expression of reconciliation. Religious communities need to reflect more deeply about forgiveness in a political context and in politically shaped atrocities such as the killings of 1918-1923 in Ireland, and the more recent phase of violence and killing in Northern Ireland, border counties, Dublin, and England.
- Without truth-telling the way into a future may not emerge. The key biblical word for forgiveness means release. Primarily it has to do with release from economic debts. It also has to do with release from the past which prevents the future. Out of the South African experience, Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote a book with the challenging title, *No Future Without Forgiveness*.

1 How important is a critical understanding of history to dealing with the past?

2 Outline a strategy for dealing with the past and engaging with a process of reconciliation in Ireland.

Feedback and Plenary Reflections

What are the main takeaway points from this session?

(Adapted from Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision pp197-217)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise: In an open plenary invite participants to briefly complete the sentence 'Spirituality is...'**		5 mins
2	**Input 1 – What is spirituality?**		10 mins
3	**Group discussion**		20 mins
4	**Feedback**		10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Values in Public Life**		10 mins
6	**Group activity**		20 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary takeaway from the session**		15 mins

"There are a few foundational values that the common good is built on. I think the first is human dignity, the fact that every life is of value and that everyone is worthy of respect. The second value that underpins it would be justice, a sense of justice. I think a third value would be empathy or compassion, and I think a fourth is probably generosity."

(Project Interviewee)

"...ethical considerations in business are equally as important as ethical considerations in health care and community work."

(Project Interviewee)

"Francis Fukuyama...in his most recent book...is talking about the fact that hyper individualism will be the death of us...that if we are to survive, what we need is a pursuit of the common good."

(Project Participant)

- The six integrated strands of reconciliation have no hierarchical order. They stand as integrated. The socio-spiritual is no more or less important than the others, all six belong together in the vision and practice of reconciliation.
- Spirituality is not and never has been the monopoly of organised religion. Christianity has no monopoly on the spiritual or Sacred. There is a spirituality, or heartbeat in different world religions, varieties of humanism, atheism, and philosophies of life.
- In a world of inequality, violence, hunger, war, poverty, abuses of power, greed, exploitation, and the destruction of the planet, we search for meaning, purpose and values.
- Spirituality is about the holistic, a fully integrated approach to life. It is life as a whole.
- Spirituality is the quest for the 'sacred', the 'something more', entering the depth of existence, exploring the endless mysteries of the cosmos.
- Spirituality is the quest for meaning, the purpose of life, a sense of life direction. It is a quest for the non-material or more than material dimension to life.
- Spirituality is the quest for ultimate values beyond a purely materialistic approach to life. It is the self-reflective life concerned with ethics and moral vision.
- Spirituality is drawn from many sources and is diverse. One source is in Hinduism as expressed in Sashi Tharoor's book, *Why I Am A Hindu?* Tharoor sets out five major principles of Hinduism, expressing its spirituality in today's world.

1. The recognition of the unity of all mankind (sic)...the world is one family.
2. The harmony of all religions.
3. The divinity inherent in everyone, transcending the social stratification and hierarchies that have all too often distorted the principle in Hindu society.
4. The creative synthesis of practical action and contemplative knowledge, science and religion, mediation, and social service, in the faith.
5. The cosmic vision of Hindu philosophy, incorporating the infinite galaxies of which the Earth is just a speck.

- John Gray, an atheist and philosopher, expresses atheist spirituality in his book, *Seven Shades of Atheism*. Gray recognises that philosophy and theology struggle to understand what it means to be human, a shared quest of the human spirit into the mystery of existence.
- Gray cites a German philosopher and atheist who rejected the idea of a creator-god, but insisted on the reality of something incommunicable that was not far from the apophatic tradition in Christianity, the most we know of God is that we do not know.
- Gray draws attention to Isaiah and the prophet's awareness that God may have withdrawn from the world, - an absent God.
- A truly human species may be as elusive as any deity. Modern atheism and belief share a *'deus absconditus'*- absence. For Gray, living without belief or unbelief is a spiritual pathway. A godless world is as mysterious as one suffused with divinity, and the difference between the two may be less than we think. There is a godless mysticism.
- In the 'I' world of Western Enlightenment individualism, spirituality too often appears as an individualistic quest for self-realization. In contrast, spirituality is also being used in today's world with reference to public values that require the ethical transformation of social structures.
- There is a consciousness within Christianity that the quest for, and practice of, spirituality needs to bring together the mystical and prophetic political approaches to spirituality. It is described as the 'critical prophetic type'.
- It is a spirituality of systems and structures, a socially critical spirituality. The Hebrew prophets, and Jesus, was in the prophetic tradition, were social critics with prophetic imaginations for alternative just and compassionate societies, and voices of hope. It was and is a spirituality of social justice.
- Prophetic spirituality is at the heart of the world and its life and is a spirituality of public issues.

1. Reflect on spirituality as a quest for meaning, purpose and values.
2. Reflect on each of the spiritualities of Hinduism, Atheism and Christianity. Are there connections between them and a shared spirituality for life?

- We live our lives in community. We are public beings, and our flourishing and wellbeing are inseparable from the values that underpin all public life. What are the values that underpin all public life?
- Values and attitudes are closely connected, and nothing is private. Sectarian, racist, homophobic, and sexist attitudes reflect prejudice and become social, political, and structural, finding expression in policies and legislation. Attitudes of sectarianism, racism, homophobia, and sexism do not believe in the dignity, equality and worth of every person.
- Where do we get our public values from? From parents, our community, our faith, our religion, the humanist tradition, or secular philosophies of life, school, and education?
- Values have historical roots. Public values go back into history. We are heirs to Athens and Jerusalem.
- The ancient Greeks outlined habits of mind and heart that steer us towards cooperation with one another, towards the common good. They thought in terms of public life together and gave expression to four significant virtues.
    - Temperance
    - Courage
    - Prudence
    - Justice
- Justice was personal and communal, and all four virtues were socio-political and apply to the whole person and the whole society.
- Socrates was born in 469 BCE in Athens. He always asked critical questions and critical questioning was big for Socrates. Humans are to question, question, question. He pushed ethical questions: What is good? Who is qualified to rule? What is love?
- In Western society we are heirs to Jerusalem and the Hebrew prophetic tradition. This includes prophets like Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah. They shaped the socio-political consciousness of their time. The prophetic tradition shaped the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and the ethical narratives of books like Joshua, Judges I and II, Samuel, I and II Kings, known as the Former Prophets. Most of the Hebrew Bible is in the prophetic tradition.

- The prophets were critics of social, political, and economic systems and structures, critiquing structures of injustice, inequality, and violence. They voiced just and compassionate alternatives and articulated hope for a different future.
- They were voices from the edge in solidarity with the poor, vulnerable and marginalised of their societies, urban and rural. They held up an alternative social vision rooted in social ethics and values.
- The Bible is a book not so much about religion, certainly not institutional religion, but a book about messy politics, unjust economic systems, domination systems and religion colluding with imperial power. It is a book struggling with public ethics and values that might make for a more flourishing eco-human community and realise something of a common good.
- There is no common good and no integration of the strands of reconciliation without ethics and values. Spirituality as socially critical spirituality is centred on social ethics and public values.
- The Greek humanist tradition and the Hebrew prophetic tradition, which is the heart of the Christian or Jesus movement tradition, have shaped Western ethics and values.
- We are heirs to Athens and Jerusalem even if we have forgotten or were never consciously aware of these roots.
- Western history has not always expressed these Greek and Hebrew ethics. Our history of Christian European slavery, European imperialism also legitimised by religion, and our industrial revolutions built on the slave trade and our free market capitalism, all destructive of the environment, have wilfully ignored Athens and Jerusalem.
- The Stalinist purges of human life and the Gulags were not rooted in religion but in the denial of all that was ethical in Greek humanism.
- Yet the ethics and values of Greek humanism and the Hebrew prophetic socio-religious ethics remain as the deep well of Western moral and ethical praxis.
- There is urgent need to renew our deep-rooted ethical consciousness and place our core ethical values at the heart of our living towards reconciliation and the vision of the common good. It is the socio-spiritual strand of reconciliation.

Outline an ethical charter and its relevance for the common good and reconciliation in Ireland today.

Feedback and Plenary Reflection

What are the main takeaway points from this session?

VALUING THE COMMON GOOD

A Series of Seven Civic Conversations

By Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision* pp 42-47, 299-303)

Session Outline

1	**Overview of course: Valuing the Common Good**		5 mins
2	**Guidelines for interaction**		5 mins
3	**Introductory exercise : In groups of 4 share a value that is important to you and say why?**		10 mins
4	**Input 1 – Common Good Values and Actions**		10 mins
5	**Group discussion**		15 mins
6	**Feedback**		10 mins
7	**Input 2 – Value-based Socio-Political Leadership for the Common Good**		10 mins
8	**Group discussion**		15 mins
9	**Feedback**		10 mins

Valuing the Common Good

Since the 'Is There a Common Good?' programme began in January 2021, the world has literally changed. The world order has been shaken, there has been a hollowing out of democracy, a diminution of human rights and an abandonment of truth. A clear demand that emerged as this education and research programme progressed was the need to reimagine values underpinning any vision of the common good and for strategic action, going beyond words. Values are not values without action, they are lived and embodied in the practice of the common good.

This seven-session course entitled 'Valuing the Common Good' will provide participants the opportunity to share in civic conversations on common good values and actions. Case studies exemplifying social histories where the common good was undermined or flagrantly disregarded will be discussed, alongside value-based responses to these dehumanising realities. The course will explore questions such as: 'What can we learn from Eastern and Indigenous wisdom traditions?', 'Are there values from the past that need to be recovered?', and 'What actions can we take to make a difference?'

Guidelines for Interaction

The interactive nature of this course provides opportunity for participants to have their say on the values and actions that underpin a common good society, as well as listen to the perspectives of others in the group. To ensure participants feel safe and valued as they engage in the learning process, it is important that agreed guidelines for interaction are established in the form of a group contract. What would you like to see included in this contract? Write guidelines on a flip-chart page as participants name them. Keep list visible and draw attention to it when necessary.

- Irish philosopher, Patrick Riordan, underlines the connection between actions for the common good and the values that inform said actions. "Goods are the concrete goods of our activities and values tell us why the goods we pursue are worth pursuing."

  (Riordan, *Recovering Common Goods*, 2017, p 32).

- Values, then, express the way and the why of our actions. They can shape our purpose, give meaning to our actions, and determine the goods we pursue.

- There is no common good without ethical values, and living these values enables us to discover the common good in real terms in our relationships with the human and eco world.

- The common good is concerned ultimately with transforming unjust systems and structures for the benefit of all. This involves change, which we can all struggle with, even if it is understood to be necessary and liberating.

- One of the contributors to the project shared a perspective on the ingredients that go into positive change for the common good.

  "I often say when I'm out speaking, change has six elements. **C** stands for the **Challenge of change**. **H** stands for **Hard work**, and it is hard work. **A** stands for **Agreement** with other people, you can't make change on your own. **N** is about **Networking**, about getting similar people who have done similar things all over the world and are willing to share that experience. **G** is **Grasping opportunities** and **E** is about **Evolving** with the change. Change very often comes from the bottom-up, it doesn't come from the top, they're quite happy with the way things are."

  (Project Interviewee)

- It is much more comfortable to keep talking and allow the conversation to become the result. Instead, reflection that leads to affirmative action toward a common good society is key to realising the hoped-for end.

- As the project interviewee indicated, change that enables the common good cannot be imposed from above, without consultation. Instead, the changes needed are discovered in and through civic engagement.

- We cannot always know in advance how best to actualise the common good:

  "… a searching and inclusive conversation needs to take place before action is attempted prematurely. In the absence of such a conversation, it is virtually certain that any action would serve those who have the dominant interests in the conversation".

  (Sagovsky and McGrail, *Together for the Common Good: Toward a National Conversation*, 2015, p xxix).

- The common good, then, is always constructed in and through public discussion or civic conversations about what is needed to improve the quality of citizens' lives and the environment.
- It fosters solidarity among those pursuing the common action where responsibility is shared. It also promotes subsidiarity, that is it empowers people to address their own problems and find solutions.
- Change is inevitable and common good outcomes can result if we are open to new knowledge and experiences, engage in attentive and deep listening, show respect for each other, and encourage acceptance of difference and diversity.

1. What are the dominant values that inform Western society? Are they common good values?

2. Participants on the project identified values they believed enabled a common good society. Do you agree with the list? Are there values missing from the list that you believe are core to a common good society?

    - Social solidarity and compassion for all of life.
    - Openness to learning the truths of the other, especially the marginalised and excluded.
    - Humility and a recognition of our shared humanity and vulnerability.
    - Justice in public life and right relations rooted in distributive and restorative justice.
    - Radical inclusivity, where all are included in society and no person is diminished or left out.
    - Active non-violence, where there is no appeal to the use of violence or dependence on violence to control or change things.
    - Commitment to human and environmental well-being and flourishing.
    - Hope in the possibility of new beginnings and fresh possibilities.

- When the political parties in Northern Ireland agreed a final document that would become the *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement*, they understood the importance of establishing a value-based framework.
- In the *Preamble* to the Agreement, they committed to furthering reconciliation, adhering to the democratic process, upholding "the human rights of all", and developing a "partnership" approach founded on the principles of "equality and mutual respect".

  (*Belfast/Good Friday Agreement*,1998, p 1).
- Political leadership recognised that what was needed going forward was the establishment of a "peaceful, stable, cohesive, prosperous and fair society". (*Programme for Government 2008-2011*, p 5). And that these values represent a break with the past and a fresh common good start.
- The reality is that the commitment to reconciliation, partnership, equality, and mutual respect, as a methodology and goal, floundered in the years following the signing of the *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* and establishment of a devolved government.
- Duncan Morrow points out that by 2006 and the *St Andrews Agreement* the commitment to peace and reconciliation, and the provision of "equality law, integrated education, shared housing, civic forums, bills of rights or a shared future" was downplayed.

  (Morrow, "Brexit has blown open the unreconciled divisions in Northern Ireland", 2017, p 2).
- A return to the vision for reconciliation and peace and the value-base contained in the *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* (1998) offers the best way forward for healing relationships in Northern Ireland, as well as strengthening relations North-South and East-West.
- Morrow states that: "Without the Agreement, there is nothing in Irish history which acknowledges the requirement for partnership, equality, and mutual respect. And there is nothing which commits everyone to "exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues".

  (Morrow, "Walking away from the Good Friday Agreement may look easy. Picking up the pieces will take decades", 2018, p 3).
- Two of the principal architects of the Agreement, who put their political futures on the line for the sake of the common good, were former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble, and former leader of the Social and Democratic Labour Party, John Hume. Both demonstrated value-based political leadership.

- Their courage and commitment to reconciliation, peace and justice is reflected in the lectures each delivered when receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace. Their words are as relevant today as then.

"… The mountain, if we could but see it clearly, is not in front of us but behind us, in history - a shadow from the past thrown forward into our future. It is a dark sludge of historical sectarianism. We can leave it behind us if we wish. But both communities must leave it behind because both created it. Each thought it had good reason to fear the other … Ulster Unionists, fearful of being isolated on the island, built a solid house, but it was a cold house for Catholics. And northern nationalists, although they had a roof over their heads, seemed to us as if they meant to burn the house down."

(Trimble, Oslo, 10 December 1998).

"I want to see Ireland as an example to men and women everywhere of what can be achieved by living for ideals, rather than fighting for them, and by viewing each and every person as worthy of respect and honour. I want to see an Ireland of partnership where we wage war on want and poverty, where we reach out to the marginalised and dispossessed, where we build together a future that can be as great as our dreams allow."

(Hume, Oslo, 10 December 1998).

- Their words not only speak into the present context but give hope, as they did then, that the future can be different if we give reconciliation in all its strands - socio-political, socio-economic, socio-ecological, socio-legal, socio-psychological, and socio-spiritual a real try.
- It is up to everyone to realise our potential to become a truly reconciled people and for that vision to become reality we need truthful, compassionate, and inclusive civic engagement and conversations within Northern Ireland and across these islands. We need a value-based society committed to the common good.

1. In the present context, what common good values and actions are needed locally and globally?
2. Where do you see examples of common good values and actions in operation?

The voices of young people represented in chapter 8 of the book were exclusively from Northern Ireland. If this course and session is taking place in Northern Ireland, use Input 1 entitled: The Voices That Count, from *Is There A Common Good: Living Towards The People's Vision*, pp 236-240 and corresponding group questions.

Otherwise use Input 2 on: Understanding the Worldview of Young People and a Common Good, some of which is drawn from Czech public intellectual, Tomas Halik, and his deep engagement and analysis of society and world in his book, *The Afternoon of Christianity: The Courage to Change*, 2024, pp116-122. See the discussion questions for Input 2.

Important to this session is the input and intergenerational conversation with young people and the significance of their voices.

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise: In small groups asks adult participants to share their thoughts in response to the question: Once you were the young ones. What were your big concerns then?**	5 mins
2	**Presentations by four local young people (17-18 years) on 'Our concerns as young people and hopes for the future'.**	(5 mins each = 20 mins in total)
3	**Invite plenary intergenerational questions, responses and conversations.**	20 mins
4	**<u>Either</u> Input 1 – The Voices That Count <u>Or</u> Input 2 – A General Understanding of the Worldview of Young People and a Common Good.**	10 mins
5	**Group discussion (See relevant questions relating to Input 1 or Input 2).**	20 mins
6	**Feedback and plenary: What have been your takeaways from the session?**	15 mins

The following represent the voices of young people who made presentations at an ISE 'Is there a common good?' programme to mark the 25th anniversary of the *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement*.

- "I want to see a more diverse Northern Ireland, a more inclusive Northern Ireland that doesn't shy away from anybody because of what they believe or how they conduct their life."
- "…in Scotland they lowered the minimum age to 16, along with places like Austria and Germany in local elections. They are successful countries so that maybe shows then that young people getting involved in politics may be the way for the future."
- "I think there is hope for Northern Ireland … we are one of the best places to live in my opinion. I love living here but I want, most importantly, change to happen and willingness to change to become a more widespread thought for everybody."
- "In my opinion the *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* was essential for the restoration of peace in Northern Ireland and improved the safety of everyone in our communities. Without the *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* I don't believe Northern Ireland would be where it is at as a whole…. Although Northern Ireland has come a long way since 1998, it still faces challenges like every country, some more major than others."
- "Low productivity is the biggest economic challenge facing Northern Ireland, being about 40% lower than the Republic of Ireland … Levels of research and investment in research and development in Northern Ireland are below the UK average. Northern Ireland possesses a skills gap compared with the rest of the UK."
- "As a whole, Northern Ireland is responsible for ensuring legacy issues are addressed and resolved…. An important factor of this is initiation of a programme of memorialisation of the Troubles…. The Troubles have resulted in intergenerational trauma, and extreme mental health problems...."
- "Whether we are pro-life or pro-choice, I think most people can appreciate that the vital abortion services presented to women in our society are not adequate. For years women were humiliated for having a child out of wedlock, from incest or rape. They were cruelly humiliated, put in homes and victimised."
- "… no woman should have her rights infringed. 71% of people in Northern Ireland agree that it is a woman's right to choose whether to have an abortion … It is only fair on the women of society, for their safety, that women are provided with appropriate services and support for safe abortions."

- "… in future an MLA's job should not be taken up with arguments as to why the sovereignty of this country should or shouldn't change hands, but rather to prove to people that through the problems they solve and things they get done, here is a way of running the country that is going to be of the most benefit to everyone."
- "The total value of goods and services produced in Northern Ireland is the third lowest out of the 12 UK regions …. The rate of economic inactivity is 25.8%, which remains the highest anywhere in the UK …. The gap between public spending and tax revenue is £4,939 per person, which is again the highest of all UK regions."
- "… education is a particularly contentious issue in Northern Ireland. Whilst schooling is excellent in parts, real inequality exists. This leads to low educational attainment in the poorest areas, impacting persons for all of their lives. The fact is that separation based on gender, religion and political identity is not sustainable."
- "It is an extremely odd situation, over half the population is Catholic by background and quite a large chunk of these people haven't really had the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds. How do communities get to know each other when, for the most part, they are kept apart?"
- "As stated in the *Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022*, 'The Northern Ireland departments must ensure that the net Northern Ireland emissions account for carbon dioxide for the year 2050 is at least 100% lower than the baseline for carbon dioxide'. But it is hard to make good on that if our pattern of absenteeism continues."
- "… Northern Ireland is the only region in the UK where ammonia levels have not been decreasing … it would be beneficial to the future of the country if we could work on trying to make our country a little more liveable for the future, not just for us, but for the generations to follow us as well."
- "… a wish of mine is to see the government take a firmer stand against paramilitary organisations, though I am not surprised it isn't on the agenda now. We need to move past violence as a nation, be that as part of the UK or otherwise."
- "At the end of the day, whether you want to stay in the UK or leave and join with the Republic has absolutely nothing to do with healthcare, agriculture etc. It's incredibly dysfunctional that every few years another party gets annoyed and abstains from politics, and the rest of us are forced to wait for Westminster to swoop in and make us functional again … We as a people should never-the-less strive for a political system that works."

- These are general expressions of a worldview and are not complete nor do they claim to be exhaustive or fully representative.
- A downside is that Irish young people face three demons: poverty, drugs, and mental health issues. For many in Northern Ireland the latter are related to the recent violent conflict and its legacies. In the Republic of Ireland, a recent report showed an increase in mental health issues among young LGBTQI+ with high levels of stress and bullying being experienced.
- Today's generation are a scientific generation with science featuring large on the school curriculum and the now decades old Young Scientist of the Year awards. Science shapes young people's cosmology and how they see the world. Nature and the universe and LGBTQI+ are viewed through scientific lens rather than religious lens.
- Young people today are said to live in the age of the third Enlightenment. The first Enlightenment in the 17th -18th centuries was the age of reason. Reason was supreme but it gave rise to the perverted rationality of totalitarian regimes. e.g. the French Revolution.
- The second Enlightenment was a revolt against authority in the 1960s, a demand for self-realization and desire for freedom. It reached its peak in the 1968 Cultural Revolution, which saw student riots in France, Germany, the United States and other countries. It ended in police crackdown and victory for the consumer mentality.
- The third Enlightenment is in process, in which we are seeing anti-globalisation protests, a current wave of violence and unrest. e.g. the tearing down of monuments, which began in 2020, such as the Edward Coulston statue dumped in the harbour at Bristol. This is an expression of opposition to the past, opposing the centuries-old legacy of Western civilization, accusing it of racism, colonialism, and cultural chauvinism.
- A loss of faith and trust in the economic and political worlds is leading to populism, political extremism, and fanaticism. Globalisation has radically accelerated the Internet era.
- The visions and values of the Third Enlightenment are still being shaped and there are values appealing to a young generation that express their worldview and ideas. The core value of the first Enlightenment was the liberation of reason. The second Enlightenment core value was the liberation of emotionality. The third Enlightenment core value is the liberation of nature from human technological and economic manipulation. There is also respect for minorities, including sexual minorities, and for all under threat, including animals.

- Many young people across the world have demonstrated against the destruction of nature and biodiversity. Young people are concerned with environmental responsibility in an era of climate change, including a rejection of neo liberal capitalism and unlimited growth. Greta Thunberg is a youth prophet of this age.
- Many young people today are cosmopolitan, accepting, and welcoming cultural pluralism. There are signs of a willingness to engage in civic initiatives and movements and to show solidarity with people in need and participate in volunteerism. A significantly large number of students at Queen's University, Belfast are involved in volunteerism.
- There is, though, an individualism and disdain for traditional institutions and these include political parties and churches. Most of the 2 million plus young people born in Ireland since the 1998 *Belfast-Good Friday Agreement* are not in political parties or churches.
- At the same time many young people living in a world without voice are vulnerable and project that vulnerability onto the world. Do young people today have a vision of a common good or do they mostly view their future and the future of the world in very dark colours?
- Today's young people are living in a radically changing world and are and will be part of the change. Young people will have to confront many social, political, moral, and spiritual changes.

Following Input 1:

For those who have listened to 'Voices That Count from Northern Ireland', the following might be helpful for discussion.

1. What struck you most about the voices and thoughts of young people from Northern Ireland?
2. Are there grounds for hope for a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland - Ireland, and is a common good with common good values possible?

Following Input 2:

For those who have listened to 'Understanding the World of Young People and a Common Good', the following might be helpful for discussion.

1. If we are living through the Third Enlightenment, what are its characteristics and values and how are young people shaping it?
2. How are young people viewing the future of the planet-world-Ireland? Is there hope for a common good with a significant value base?

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision* pp 243-274)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise - Buzz and feedback on the question: What opportunities are there for connecting with people from diverse ethnicities in your locality?**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Our 'Glocal' World: The Right to have Rights!**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	20 mins
4	**Feedback**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – The Journey to Integrated Diversity**	15 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	10 mins

- "We live in an unjust world, in a world whereby some parts of the world, or some people, get on by oppressing other people … We are not made better because of other people's suffering. I think it diminishes us."

(Project Interviewee)

- Many millions of men, women, and children are facing severe humanitarian crises, living as refugees in search of basic subsistence and protection. Many more have been internally displaced and are in search of a place of safety within their own borders.
- Richard Haass, recently retired from the post of President of the Council on Foreign Relations (2003-2023) based in New York, while affirming the importance of respecting national borders, was at pains also to stress that political responsibilities reach beyond these boundaries.
- He appealed to countries to recognise these obligations as 'sovereign duties' and assist those threatened by genocide, ethnic cleansing, forced migration, internal displacement, or other human rights violations. He underlined the fact that we are all part of the human family and as with all families we have a moral duty of care.

(Haass, 2017, quoted in Hollenbach,
Humanity In Crisis: Ethical and Religious Response to Refugees, 2019, p 8).

- Hannah Arendt was a forceful advocate for refugees and asylum seekers, having experienced firsthand the danger to life and freedom when as a Jew she was deprived of her rights as a German citizen and experienced living as a stateless person for 18 years in France and America.
- In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argued that: "…the calamity of the right-less is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion-formulas designed to solve problems within given communities – but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever."
(Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2017, p 386).
- Arendt suggested that the right to belong to a political community should, therefore, be a precondition for the protection of all other rights.

"Only as a citizen of a nation-state can a person enjoy legally protected rights to education, to work, to vote, to healthcare, to culture, and so on. Hence, Arendt declared that before there can be any specific civil, political, or social rights, there must be such a thing as a 'right to have rights'."

(DeGooyer *et al.*, *The Right to Have* Rights, 2018, p 2).

- This speaks directly into our current world context where violent conflict, climate change and absolute poverty are forcing large numbers of people to flee their homelands and seek asylum and the recognition of their human rights in other countries.

  "Political action on behalf of the right to have rights would demand institutional and legal changes - for example, immigration reform, an end to detention practices – that would create a world where undocumented individuals could publicly and fearlessly demand their rights."

  (DeGooyer, 2018, p 54).

- In June 2023 the Supreme Court ruled that the UK government's policy to expel people seeking asylum from the UK to Rwanda under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rwandan government was unlawful and would be a breach of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (AAA and others v The Secretary of State for the Home Department).

- This was because of deficiencies in the Rwandan asylum system that meant there was a real risk people would be returned to their home countries where they could face persecution or worse. This delayed the passing of the bill.

- The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill received Royal Assent on 25 April 2024 and was renamed the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024.

- Denisa Delić, director of advocacy at International Rescue Committee UK, said, "…sending refugees to Rwanda is an ineffective, unnecessarily cruel, and costly approach. Rather than outsourcing its responsibilities under international law, we urge the government to abandon this misguided plan and instead focus on delivering a more humane and orderly immigration system at home. This includes scaling up safe routes, such as resettlement and family reunion, and upholding the right to seek asylum."

  (Quoted in "UK passes bill to send asylum seekers to Rwanda", by Rajeev Syal et al, The Guardian Newspaper, 22 April 2024).

- Lord Anderson of Ipswich, a leading lawyer who sits on the crossbench, said of the scheme, "Its benefits remain to be seen. Its costs will be measured, not only in money, but in principles debased: disregard for our international commitments, avoiding statutory protections for the vulnerable, and the removal of judicial scrutiny over the core issue of the safety of Rwanda."

  (Quoted in "UK passes bill to send asylum seekers to Rwanda", by Rajeev Syal et al, The Guardian Newspaper, 22 April 2024).

- The new Labour government have decided to scrap the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024, in favour of speeding up the asylum process. Time will tell if their foreign policy approach will be more humane and incorporate the 'right to have rights' philosophy that has the potential to reduce global conflict.

In your group read the short reflections and discuss the questions that follow.

"There is a lot of discrimination against those who come here from outside. The law prevents us from doing certain things and in the workplace barriers are put in our way to stop us progressing. I was seen as someone from Africa who had experienced pain and would be happy just belonging. We should be able to have tough conversations. If people don't take the time to ask who we are, or what we want, how can we have a common good?"

(Ethnic Communities Focus Group)

"Poland was a communist country – we didn't have a common good, we were told by the government what the common good was. We were told we were living the dream. This dream wasn't coming from within people, no one was asked about their dreams. You can't tell people what the common good is. People need to find it for themselves, we all have a responsibility to look for it."

(Ethnic Communities Focus Group)

"It hurts to say refugee – in Ukraine I was so respected. Here I am 'a nobody'."

(Ukrainian Women's Focus Group)

"I have been privileged to attend many diversity, equity and inclusion and anti-racism training events and more and more I hear the question being posed, 'Are We Really BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic)?' The consensus is that this lumps all ethnic communities together for one main reason administration. This othering, by using the term BAME, is viewed as part of a power play process - the development of 'them and us'."

(Ethnic Communities Focus Group)

1. What are the obstacles to integration? Why do you think this is the case?
2. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt comments that "whether we like it or not, we have really started to live in One World". (1950, p 388). Do you agree with her?

- "If we were all the same, we would have nothing unique to contribute, nor anything to learn from others. The more diverse we are, the richer our culture becomes, and the more expansive our horizons of possibility. But that depends on our willingness to bring our differences as gifts to the common good. It requires integration rather than segregation."

  (J. Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society*, 2007, p 10).

- What has become clear in this education and research project is that any attempt to realise a meaningful common good society will only succeed if all living in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland feel included and know that they count as part of the community.

- As people share their stories and what has shaped them, we gain privileged insights into what it is to be human and our interdependence and interconnectedness.

- We come to understand what has brought those from other countries to the island of Ireland and what their lives were like before they made the journey. We are made more aware of the inextricable ways in which our choices impact the lives of those both near and far.

- Where there is separation between ethnic communities and difference is emphasised, racism and prejudice can fester and result in conflict and violence. A participant on the project drew attention to this disturbing reality:

  "Racist hate incidents and hate crimes have overtaken sectarian hate crimes in Northern Ireland, which is alarming given the ethnic minority community makes up less than five per cent of the population. And how does it manifest? In all kinds of behaviour, from harassment to name-calling, to windows being broken, tyres being slashed, all the kind of things that somebody who hates somebody would do."

  (Project Participant)

- For the common good to have any meaning a shared understanding of society is crucial. This means going beyond tolerance in our social relationships, so that 'my' good is not in competition with 'your' good, and the possibilities of working together to improve the lot of all will not be sacrificed in the zero-sum game.

- Justice requires the minimum level of solidarity to challenge and transform a system that is failing the most vulnerable and not delivering the basic needs that ensure everyone's human dignity. Whether it is a decent house, or a basic income, or good education, these are minimal level requirements to secure human dignity that every citizen has a right to.
- Working together to secure these rights, rather than competing for them, is the common good way forward, and a more viable approach to securing the basic demands of social justice.
- As one project participant put it: "I think the common good should address the problems of the rights and equality of education and employment and welfare to ensure justice and equality for all and, of course, ensure the freedom to express your own culture and faith and identity."
- The Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 for Northern Ireland suggests an integrationist approach to community building, promoting intercultural education and the creation of shared spaces in schools, communities, and workplaces.
- In relation to asylum seekers and refugees, while acknowledging that immigration policy is made in Westminster, the strategy confirms the need to set up positive initiatives to support both groups of people. These include the following: setting up a crisis fund for vulnerable migrants; free English classes; access to free healthcare for asylum seekers; and ensuring asylum seeking children and trafficked children are assigned an independent legal guardian.
- Four outcomes are suggested as measures to gauge the impact of the Racial Equality Strategy in society. These are:

  1. Equality of service provision.
  2. Elimination of prejudice, racism and hate crime.
  3. Increased participation, representation and belonging. And,
  4. Celebration of cultural diversity.

  (OFMDFM, 2015, pp 40-46).

- The Republic of Ireland's population is more ethnically diverse than Northern Ireland's. The 2022 Census statistics showed that 12 per cent of the population where non-Irish citizens and that nearly half of this number were citizens of the European Union.

  (Central Statistics Office, *Press Statement Census 2022 Results, Profile 5 - Diversity, Migration, Ethnicity, Irish Travellers and Religion.*26 October 2023).

- 77 per cent of people identified their ethnic group or background as White Irish. The next largest ethnic group was Any Other White background at 10 per cent, followed by Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi at 2 per cent, and Black or Black Irish at 1 per cent.

(Central Statistics Office, *Press Statement Census 2022 Results, Profile 5*. 26 October 2023).

- The number of Irish Travellers living in the Republic of Ireland and counted in Census 2022 was 32,949, an increase of 6% from the 2016 census. Irish Travellers make up less than 1% of the population.

(Central Statistics Office, *Press Statement Census 2022 Results, Profile 5*. 26 October 2023).

- Priority actions in the Republic of Ireland's National Action Plan Against Racism, 2023, have been developed around five objectives:
  1. Being Safe and Being Heard – Supporting people who experience racism and protecting people from racist incidents and crimes.
  2. Being Equal – Addressing ethnic inequalities.
  3. Being Seen and Taking Part – Enabling minority participation.
  4. Being Counted – Measuring the impacts of racism.
  5. Being Together – A shared journey to racial equality.

(NAPAR, 2023, p 16).

- The plan outlines action points under each of the five objectives and indicates who will take each action forward and the completion date. Set into the plan, then, are measures for advancing it, delivery agents and deadlines.
- The emphasis on outcomes, with the availability of a funding pot for projects and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur to oversee implementation, creates the conditions for successful delivery.
- There is learning here for Northern Ireland on how to set targets, deliver them and measure what is working and what is not.

1. Can you suggest ways of strengthening connections between diverse ethnic communities locally and globally?
2. How can people be helped let go of fears of difference and of the 'other' to find the resilience to create a common good future?

Feedback and Plenary Discussion

What common good values are core to the educating of truly 'glocal' citizens who will affirm and embrace the integration of the local and the global?

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision*, pp 290-298)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise: In small groups share your reflections on the question: What was your experience in the education system?**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	20 mins
4	**Feedback**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Overcoming the Educational Deficit: The Local Common Good**	15 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	10 mins

- Michael J. Sandel in his book, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* exposes the injustice at the heart of our meritocratic system that ignores the inequalities in society which result in different life experiences and opportunities within families.
- Meritocracy operates from the premise that those who do well in school and university, and end up in good careers, earn their success by themselves. And those who leave education with few qualifications and find themselves in low-paying jobs with zero-hour contracts, have only themselves to blame. This not only ignores how economics and class impact learning experiences but also the way children and young adults are psychologically impacted by their experiences of success or failure in the education system.

  (Michael J. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* 2020, pp 116-119).

- Agreeing with Sandel, Patrick Riordan indicates that "…the public display of success and failure results in a loss of solidarity and any sense of interdependence within society".

  (P. Riordan, *Human Dignity and Liberal Politics: Catholic Possibilities for the Common Good*, 2023, p 316).

- One of the participants on the project, while not using the language of meritocracy, also raised the dangers of an individualistic approach to education:

  "As long as we are educating our young ones to strive to be the most competitive and look for those salaries that reflect a particular type of lifestyle, then we can't change anything. It starts with education. Should we be teaching them competition is more important than cooperation? It's a matter of changing the way we look at things."

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), recognising the importance of preparing people of all ages to meet 21st century ethical challenges, produced an educational resource in 2015 entitled, *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?*
- Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, in the publication's Foreword indicates the importance of re-visioning education to meet local, national, and global challenges:

  "There is no more powerful transformative force than education to promote human rights and dignity; to eradicate poverty and deepen sustainability; to build a better future for all founded on equal rights and social justice, respect for cultural diversity,

international solidarity and shared responsibility; all of which are fundamental aspects of our common humanity."

(UNESCO, *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* 2015, p 4).

- This ethical vision underpins the humanist approach to education adopted by UNESCO, which is founded on the moral principles of environmental stewardship, peace, inclusion, and social justice.
- The emphasis in the document on the need to protect all life forms and affirm human dignity, puts human rights education at the heart of UNESCO's approach. Raising awareness of the issues that give rise to violence, which include conflicts over land, power, and wealth, in addition to teaching conflict resolution skills to negotiate a non-violent solution, are key components in the strategy.
- The document reaffirms a "common core of universal values" that UNESCO believes are foundational if we are to achieve sustainability and peace in our world. These include: "respect for life and human dignity, equal rights and social justice, cultural and social diversity, and a sense of human solidarity and shared responsibility for our common future".

(UNESCO, *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* 2015, p 29).

- The educational methodology UNESCO employs is dialogical, with an emphasis on critical thinking and analysis, problem solving and the acquisition of skills.
- The four pillars of education that the organisation adheres to are given fresh articulation to take account of 21st century challenges, particularly in relation to living sustainably on the earth. They are:
  1. Learning to know – acquiring knowledge.
  2. Learning to do – skills-based action to manage complex situations.
  3. Learning to be - developing confidence, judgement, personal responsibility.
  4. Learning to live together - building relations with other people from diverse backgrounds and with the natural environment.

  (UNESCO, *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* 2015, p 39).

UNESCO believes that teaching children of different abilities and from different socio-political, economic, religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds collectively, is the best preparation for developing a cohesive and fairer society.

1. Do you agree or disagree, if so, why?
2. How does this educational model support the fostering of a value-based society?
3. Have we a responsibility to create global or one-world citizens?

- A society with competing visions of the good life and where compromise can be interpreted as 'selling out' your group identity, whether political or cultural or religious, can often become mired in conflict that deepens division.
- Education, akin to the model practiced by UNESCO, has the potential to liberate people into a space where it is possible to embrace difference and diversity, enabling the move from competition to cooperation. If, however, the educational system institutionalises the divisions along sectarian lines, this limits opportunities for engagement toward creating a common good society together.
- "The deep issue of sectarianism is that we look at each other through our experience of the 'other' and our experience of power. And the really big challenge is, can we find a different way to hear our stories? How do we do story-hearing?' Interrogating our respective narratives and recognising how they interconnect, challenge, and contribute towards complex shared histories and stories has the potential to enable mutual understanding."

(Project Presenter)

- The *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* 1998 recognised the importance of integrated education to heal divisions and create a more inclusive society.
- The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) produced, *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* (2005), which used the language of shared and inter-cultural education. Shared education allows for the sharing of resources and pupil contact and collaboration while retaining separate schools.
- A 2010 OFMDFM publication entitled, *Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Consultation Document* confirms a shift away from an emphasis on integrated education toward the promotion of good relations between schools and wider use of school premises and resources.
- The *Programme for Government (2011-2015)* makes no mention of integrated education and reiterates the importance of shared education for all children in Northern Ireland.
- The *Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework Consultation Document* (2021) indicates that support will be given for shared and integrated education without spelling out what in practice this means.

- What is unclear is the direction of travel. Is shared education a strategy that will lead to structural reform in the direction of integrated schools for all, or a way of maintaining the existing system of separate schools? The support for shared education is to be welcomed and it may be a stepping stone to further integration. Time will tell.
- Relationships depend on knowing our own and each other's stories, and being able to ask critical questions of our collective stories to gain a more truthful perspective that can inform current understandings and relationships.
- Several contributors to the project spoke of the importance of training in critical thinking, and dialogue and negotiation, and wondered if these life skills were included in the current school curriculum.
- Teaching children and adults to become independent thinkers, to ask questions and engage with those who have different experiences and perspectives, is essential preparation for life.

  "My generation were like cannon fodder for Unionist politicians. We believed what we were fed. We weren't taught how to be critical thinkers. I would also suggest that my community does not know how to dialogue well, to reason together without splitting or walking away. I think this is an art that needs to be taught … Where have we become closed to new ideas? As a Protestant and unionist, it seems like my community has been on the defending side - defender of the Crown, we find ourselves always on the defence, it seems to me, we have lost the art of imagination. Might it be possible to risk not being on the defence?"

  (Project Participant)

- Mairia Cahill, a former Sinn Fein activist and former SDLP Councillor, offered a similar critique of republican and nationalist narratives that are trapped in the past and reinforce sectarian thinking and actions:

  "We don't have a mature, reflective approach to dealing with what happened over the course of the conflict here. We still have fault lines, which are run through green and orange sectarian lines."
  (Mairia Cahill, quoted in P. O'Malley, *Perils and Prospects of a United Ireland*, 2023, p 113).

- There is no going back to the past, and those trapped in ideologies of the past, or closed narratives, are incapable of imagining a different future. An educational approach that does not teach critical thinking, dialogue, communication skills and conflict resolution, lacks the potential to lead us out of our insecurities and divisions into a future pregnant with hope in a shared vision of our common good.

The following statement by a participant on the *Is There A Common Good?* project raises important questions for consideration.

"What might a holistic approach to education look like that would produce creative and critical thinking and inclusive relationships? How do we promote critical thinking in civic society as well as among young people? Are we comfortable with critical questions in schools, churches, and civil society at large?"

How would you answer these three important questions?

Feedback and Plenary Discussion

Are there other critical questions we need to reflect on that are core to the development of value-based education for reconciliation for schools and the wider community?

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good: Living Towards The People's Vision* pp 311-335)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise: Buzz and feedback on the question: What do you think being human means...?**		5 mins
2	**Input 1 – Anthropological Delusions**		10 mins
3	**Group discussion**		20 mins
4	**Feedback**		10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Being More Authentically Human**		10 mins
6	**Group activity**		20 mins
7	**Feedback**		10 mins
8	**Plenary discussion**		5 mins

- Anthropology is an attempt to say what it means to be human. There is a deep-down mystery about a human person. There is much we do not know about our most significant other. The truly human has been defined by White, wealthy, and powerful males. We have always lived with anthropological delusions.
- Individualism - Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a movement from 'we' to 'I', from community to self. All roads in the seventeenth century led to individualism. The Reformations asserted the individual conscience and individualism was on its way to becoming an absolute of Western thought. The European Enlightenment became an Age of Individualism, the autonomy of the self.
- Individualism is writ large in the Western mind-set. Human rights are individual rights, morality is an individualistic choice. Individualism drives the capitalist system, the creation of wealth and the ethos of life in Western society.
- Individualism is a delusion and cannot meet the social, communal, and ecological challenges of the twenty-first century.
- Anthropocentrism - This is the human at the centre of the planet, even the universe. The human is at the pinnacle of all that is, or in religious terms, the crown of creation. It is the belief and practice that everything exists to serve the wants and needs of the human. All else has value only if it serves human needs.
- We are mysteriously connected to the entire universe. Anthropocentrism is a delusion which is destructive of our humanness anchored in the cosmos. It has destroyed the human relatedness to nature with damaging consequences for nature. In the West we need a revolution in consciousness and relatedness.
- The Anthropocene - This is the new era in the geological history of the Earth. Reading the signs of the times scientists know that there have been Earth crises before, but this is the first time that the crisis is due to human activities. *Anthropos* is Greek for human and so the Anthropocene era puts human activity at the heart of the ecological catastrophe. What does it mean now to be human?
- If the Anthropocene is the age of the human and humans are destroying the planet, what of the future? What is the human responsibility for the future? Humans and non-human nature need to work together to mend the Earth.
- Individualism and anthropocentrism have nothing to say or contribute to the shaping of a flourishing planetary future. We need a larger sense of what it means to be human and of the relationship between humans and nature. We need an eco-anthropology.

1. Reflect critically on the three delusions. Do they challenge our sense of being human?
2. Do we humans have the capacity to mend the Earth?

- Anthropology is dealing with the whole of life in its social and ecological dimensions. It is about real life and real people and real relationships, social and eco systems and structures. Anthropology is not stand alone but is bound up in the web of human and eco relationships.
- Being human with dignity, worth and respect. "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

  (Article 1 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*).
- Humanism sees every human as having dignity and equal worth - simply by virtue of their humanity. Before any other categorisation or designation, we are human.
- Christianity draws on the mytho-poetry of Genesis1. In the world of the poem only the king was in the image of the divine. The Hebrew mytho-poetry written in exile in Babylon, affirmed that every human person was in the image of God and stamped with the sacred and was of equal dignity, worth and respect.
- Islam, a partner in the Abrahamic tradition, also affirms human dignity. The outstanding and innate characteristics of human beings are dignity and nobility.
- Confucianism has shaped much of Chinese thought and imagination. Its most important ethical value is *ren*, which means humanness, humanity and refers to co-humanity or humanity together. In Confucianism we are more authentically human, of dignity and worth, in relationships.
- Being human in relationships and as social beings. Confucianism and Humanism affirm that we are more authentically human in relationships. To be human is to be in peace, being human in social relationships.
- The Hebrew mytho-poetry of Genesis 1 affirms the social, relational nature of being human. The mytho-poem affirms that the image of God is only fully realised and authentically expressed in community.
- Islam has social justice as its core and strongly underlines *ummah*, as core to Muslim practice and living. *Ummah* is a radically inclusive community, the Qur'an affirming that "God loves those who act equitably".
- Being eco-human. Confucianism realises that there is a unity between the cosmos and human beings. There is an interactive relationship between the cosmos and human beings. In the mytho-prose of Genesis 2 a wordplay between the Hebrew *adam* and *adamah* suggests that the human is of the Earth, an integral part of earth, the stuff of the Earth. The human is Earthling.

- The prologue to John's Gospel mirrors the prologue to Genesis. For both prologues there is the deep sense that the Divine or Sacred is immanent in matter, and matter, the bodily materiality, is infused with the sacred. This has profound ecological implications.
- The human is Earthling, we are the Earth, and the Earth matters because Earth is the incarnation of the Sacred, of the mystery of life, of awesome otherness and wonder.
- Indigenous religions and traditions have always known this. Western imperial domination and colonialism did much to destroy Indigenous traditions believing that they were 'pagan' and inferior to Western Christian civilization. This eliminated the common good. The world's Indigenous traditions always saw and lived the integral connection between nature and humanity.
- Western anthropocentric anthropology needs to be abandoned and an eco-human anthropology developed learning from the wisdom of Indigenous Traditions. Today community is not human community but Earth community, the whole community of life.

Write an eco-human charter for the future and common good of the planet.

Feedback and Plenary Discussion

After the feedback ask participants to share in the final plenary their takeaways from the session.

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good: Living Towards The People's Vision*, pp 337-357)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise: In your small groups imagine a world without borders. What would that be like?**	5 mins
2	**Input 1 – Citizens of the Cosmos**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	20 mins
4	**Feedback**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Cosmopolitan Commitments**	10 mins
6	**Group activity**	20 mins
7	**Feedback**	10 mins
8	**Plenary discussion**	5 mins

- An ancient Greek philosopher, Diogenes, was asked where he came from. "I am *kosmopolites*, I am a citizen of the cosmos." He refused to be confined by his local origins or by any local group. He belonged to all humanity.
- Before Diogenes, Socrates replied to the same question, that he wasn't from Athens but the world. The universe was his city. Here were people refusing to identify themselves by city, ancestors, social class, gender, Greek, non-Greek, slave or free.
- We construct binaries, we 'other' people so that we are better, superior, dominant and pure. Identity labels based on nationality, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, are all secondary. They limit us, make us less than human, rob us of authentic humanity.
- *Kosmopolities* is a moral idea, because it is recognition of the equal, unconditional worth of all and every human being.
- Borders are designations and categorisations, racial, ethnic, cultural identity markers that divide and dehumanise people. There are three types of borders constructed by humans with destructive effect.
- White supremacism - Emerging from European imperialism, of which the slave trade was an integral part. It is a construct of Christian White supremacism. White, Christian superiority, privilege, exceptionalism and this was too often expressed through extremism.
- Christendom was formed in 313 CE and became a Western phenomenon and White Christians in the West were dominant, supreme, and superior. European imperialism, hegemony, power, and wealth were built on Christian, White supremacism, as was American hegemony and power. It lingers in secular Europe and North America and is an entrenched ideological border.
- Migration - Closely aligned to White supremacism and racial constructs are migration and asylum seekers. Thousands come to Europe fleeing persecution and war, and increasingly environmental migrants.
- In 1914 European empires dominated 84 per cent of the world. In many cases migrants are here because we were there. They are fleeing to the 'mother' continent. European countries are attempting to close their borders. Brexit was about taking back control of migration, reclaiming sovereignty, and closing the borders.

- The European continent has responsibilities for peoples it conquered, colonised and from whom it made its wealth, further enhancing its power. The burden of imperial history and the role of European and American powers in the world creates a moral imperative to respond with greater intent to a major human crisis.
- Pluralism - Is pluralism a problem? The growing numbers of entrenched borders in the West that do not allow for diversity of humanity, ethnicity, culture, religion, political philosophy, and democratic practice, would suggest it is. Why the resistance to pluralism?
- How much pluralism are we prepared to live with? Do we really want a homogenous society and world, a society and world of narrow conformity?
- We live in a globalised world, and a world of globalised religions. We live in a pluralist world. This is recognised on Irish State occasions such as the inauguration of the Irish President and the National Day of Commemoration. There are prayers, reflections and recitals from Christian leaders, leaders of neighbour religions (world religions), and the Humanist community. It is representative of the secular-religious Irish landscape. Within such pluralism there is a shared ethic of life.

1. Reflect critically on the entrenched borders of White supremacy and migration.
2. How much pluralism are we prepared to live with? Do we really want to live in a homogenous society or world?

- For those with religious commitments there is the challenge to do theology without passports. Cosmopolitan theology is about the practice of justice, social, political, economic and eco justice and justice is love in action. Such theology is radical neighbourly love, which is solidarity with all citizens of the world.
- It is the practice of "impartial, planetary, and egalitarian justice and solidarity especially across all the different forms of boundaries that divide people".

  (N, Kang, in Moore et al, *Planetary Lovers: Spivak, Postcoloniality and Theology*, 2011, p 267).
- Cosmopolitan theology is also the practice of trans-religious solidarity, and with humanist and human philosophies of life.
- The *Earth Charter* is an important document for the 21st century. It came out of ten years of cross-cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values. It provides an ethical foundation for actions to build a more just, and sustainable, and peaceful global society.
- The *Earth Charter* has four main pillars:
  1. Respect and Care for the Community of Life;
  2. Ecological Integrity;
  3. Social and Economic Justice; and
  4. Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace.
- Described as a wisdom document the *Earth Charter* goes beyond the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and its call for respect for every human life. It highlights the whole community of life and calls for respect for the Earth and life in all its diversity.
- The *Earth Charter* is an assault on institutional anthropocentrism (humans at the centre of everything). While affirming the dignity of humans and their freedom, equality and right to respect, it dethrones the human. The human is not the centre of the universe and not the crown of creation.
- The monotheistic religions do need to reappraise their theological anthropology, and their cosmology also needs critical and radical reappraisal. We live in a moral universe and respect is for the whole community of life, and for its diversity. Interconnectedness and responsibility are the two main themes of the *Earth Charter.*

- Cosmopolitan commitments are expressed through global responsibility, active commitment to the whole community of life, and eco-humans knowing their decentred place in that community of life and the still evolving cosmos.
- We need a transformation of consciousness, a new and different worldview, a new cosmology, a way of seeing the cosmos differently. As people of symbolic consciousness what matters most is the mind, imagination, ideas, and values. In being Cosmopolitan, we can live more authentically towards the vision of a planetary common good. We live without passports!

As cosmopolitan citizens design a Charter for a Planetary Common Good. Include your core cosmopolitan commitments.

Feedback and Plenary

What are your takeaways from this session?

(Adapted from *Is There A Common Good? Living Towards the People's Vision*, pp 359-380)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise: What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word POWER?**	5 mins
2	**Group discussion on abuses of power**	10 mins
3	**Input 1 – What is Power?**	10 mins
4	**Plenary discussion**	10 mins
5	**Input 2 – Ethical Power**	10 mins
6	**Group activity**	20 mins
7	**Feedback**	10 mins
8	**Individual exercise and plenary**	15 mins

Abuses of Power: Patriarchal and Political

1. Find examples of patriarchal abuses of political power.
2. What are the consequences of such abuses for perpetrators and victims/survivors?

- Patriarchal power and political power can be power abused. Power is relational and flows through a cluster of web-like relationships. Ecology reminds us that we live within a web of relationships which are interdependent.
- Climate change is a breakdown of interdependence and power relations. Violence is a corruption of power, as is poverty and inequality. The abuse of women and the dehumanising abuse of those from the LGBTQI+ community is an abuse of power and destructive of human community.
- "The challenge is to recast power from being a relationship of active over passive, oppressor over oppressed, and exploiter over exploited, to a new relationship based on mutuality and creativity."

  (M. Hathaway and L. Boff, *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Liberation*, 2009, p 81).
- There are three modes of power:
  1. Power-over is power that restricts and controls. It works through systems of authority and domination.
  2. Power-from-within is power that sustains all life and is the power of creativity, healing, and love. It is expressed when people stand in solidarity to oppose the control of power-over.
  3. Power-with is the power of influence or power-as-process. This is power that enables us to act together in participatory organisations or groups. Authentic democracy is participatory power-with or power-shared.
- We can recognise the three modes of power at work in patriarchy, political and religious systems, and institutions.
- Sociologist, Michael Mann has outlined four types of social power:
  1. Military power - the monopoly or control of force and violence.
  2. Economic power - the monopoly or control of labour and production.
  3. Political power - the monopoly or control of organisation and institution.
  4. Ideological power - the monopoly or control of interpretation and meaning.

  (Mann in Crossan, 2007, p. 12).

- This is a model of imperial power that works as totalism. Empires, superpowers, and domination systems, work in this way. Some forms of nationalistic politics work also in this way.
- The future of Ireland and the United Kingdom (we might add the European Union) is open, unpredictable, and unknown. The future is the future of power, how power will be organised, what mode of power will be at the heart of future structures and systems. Power relations will be core to any future.

How do we feel about the four modes of social power?

1. Military power - the monopoly or control of force and violence.
2. Economic power - the monopoly or control of labour and production.
3. Political power - the monopoly or control of organisation and institution.
4. Ideological power - the monopoly or control of interpretation and meaning.

- Are humans fatally flawed and can we ever get away from abusing power and power-over models?
- Democracy was born in ancient Greece because of injustices and was intended to bring about relative justice between rich and poor. Solon created democracy at the intersection between economic and political power. This also required the legislation of law as an important way to achieve justice.
- The Greeks wrote great plays called tragedies. The characters were not necessarily bad people but flawed. Humans are tragically flawed. The Greek word used was *hamartia*. From the early Jesus Movement tradition Paul wrote to a community in Rome and used the same word *hamartia*. It is translated as sin and falling short. The word is from archery and describes the failure to hit the target.
- The writers of the Greek tragedies and Paul, in the Greco-Roman world of the Christian Testament, were aware that humans were tragically flawed. We keep missing the target. Neither the Greeks nor Paul tried to explain the flaw. They recognised *hamartia* as the tragic human condition. Solon, Aristotle, and Paul recognised *hamartia*, the tragic flaw, as the failure to hit the target of the common good life. The failure that abuses power.
- Power is dangerous. As Lord Acton recognised, power "tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Can flawed humanity find a way out of the corruption of power?
- Socrates was put to death because he taught young people to be critical thinkers. Education that does not teach young people to think for themselves and to be critical thinkers is not education. Critical thinking and questioning are a form of moral alertness, a moral questioning of every system and structure and exercise of power.
- Critical thinking and questioning put moral limits on power and by doing so enable "… respect for minorities, justice and the impartial rule of law, a collective commitment to the common good and a delicate balance of rights and responsibilities".

  (J. Sacks, *The Power of Ideas: Words of Faith and Wisdom*, 2021, pp 25-26).
- Power as domination is an unethical use of power. Power shared more evenly and justly, even relatively justly, is a more ethical use of power. Ultimately power is the people's power, not that of the wealthy, of males, of the majority community, or any political, cultural, or religious elite. Power belongs to the people and government is "of the people, by the people, for the people".

  (Abraham Lincoln, quoted in Sacks, *The Power of* Ideas, p 25).

- The truly human ethical values, which are the core values of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, neighbour (world) religions, and indigenous and humanist traditions are:
    1. Social justice
    2. Human dignity
    3. Compassionate solidarity
    4. The good society or common good.
- Can the future of the planet, the geopolitical world, Europe, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the USA, Palestine-Israel, (add to the list) be shaped by ethical power?

Divide the participants into Group(s) A or Group(s) B and ask them to complete the relevant task:

Group(s) A - Design a model of ethical power for national politics.

Group(s) B - Design a model of ethical power for a multi-cultural community.

Feedback, Individual Exercise and Plenary

1. Write down your takeaways from the course.

Share your takeaways in a final plenary.

DEMOCRACY MATTERS: BEYOND RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM TO JUST POLITICS

A Series of Eight Civic Conversations
by Johnston McMaster

Adapted from: Johnston McMaster, *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, Chapter 8. (Forthcoming publication)

Session Outline

1	**Overview of course: Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics** 	5 mins
2	**Guidelines for interaction** 	5 mins
3	**Introductory exercise: In small groups agree a definition of democracy and share it with the larger group** 	10 mins
4	**Input 1 – Democracy Matters: Inspired by Athens** 	10 mins
5	**Group discussion** 	15 mins
6	**Feedback** 	10 mins
7	**Input 2 – Democracy Matters: Inspired by Jerusalem** 	10 mins
8	**Group discussion** 	15 mins
9	**Feedback** 	10 mins

Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics

This course will explore the history and practice of democracy, the nature of politics and the politics of justice. It will also explore active citizenship, our role as citizens of the earth and being active citizens through collective responsibility. At the heart of democracy are values and we examine faith's public contribution to nurturing and sustaining democracy through the practice of politics in the Hebrew book of Deuteronomy and the human political values of I Corinthians 13. This is not to suggest that there are not human or humanistic values to underpin democracy. It is to suggest that the Bible is a book about messy politics and economics, and the struggle for power and community, and that its values are worked out in a very messy context in which there is always tension with and resistance to absolutism. The significant values are human values, no more so than in I Corinthians 13, which Paul has probably borrowed from a Greek humanistic source!

Guidelines for Interaction

The interactive nature of this course provides opportunity for participants to have their say on why democracy matters and listen to the perspectives of others in the group. To ensure participants feel safe and valued as they engage in the learning process it is important that agreed guidelines for interaction are established in the form of a group contract. What would you like to see included in this contract?

- We are living in the age of strongmen. Authoritarian leaders are becoming central to global politics. They each embody their nation or pretend that they do; reach for absolute power; and promote the cult of personality.

- Liberal values such as freedom of speech, independent courts and minority rights are under assault. These assaults are often shaped by religious nationalism. e.g. Russia.

- USA, Hungary, Turkey, India. Democracy is being hollowed out and the gods are at the heart of it.

1. Democracy Matters:

- "Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There never was a Democracy yet that did not commit suicide."

(US President John Adams, 1814).

- "A republic's death is often an assisted suicide."

(George Washington, 1796).

- "The Roman Republic collapsed through corrupt politics; rising economic inequalities; political polarisation; the breakdown of unspoken rules of political conduct; endemic social and ethnic prejudice; battles over access to citizenship and voting rights; ongoing military quagmires; the introduction of violence as a political tool; and a set of elites so obsessed with their own privileges that they refused to reform the system in time to save it."

(Mike Duncan, quoted in John Dominic Crossan, *Render unto Caesar: The Struggle over Christ and Culture*, 2022, p 3).

- Unaddressed inequalities lie at the heart of democratic suicide.

2. Inspired by Athens

- Democracy in Greece was created and shaped by a response to the poor and inequalities. In fifth century Athens the new thing in the governance and organisation of political and social power was the inclusion of the poorest of the citizens in deciding policy and settling disputes.

- In 594 BCE Solon laid the foundations of democracy by bringing about the abolition of debt slavery and bringing poor citizens into the citizens' assembly. Later Pericles introduced the citizen-mother. Democracy was born gradually and in stages.

- Later Socrates and Plato introduced critical questioning, always critical questioning as essential to politics. They even questioned whether democracy was the best path to a good human life. Always question politics and power.

- Unless moral and intellectual virtue underpin democracy and the good human life, there will be no real democracy and no good human life. Ethics and values are key.

- Athenian democracy didn't last. Between 322-321 BCE Alexander the Great was in power and imposed a property qualification for citizenship. The poor were excluded from democracy.

- Power, poverty and inequality led to the creation of democracy and democracy was extinguished, committed suicide, when inequality and poverty were imposed by elites.

- Economics and democracy are inseparable, as are the qualities of moral and intellectual virtue advanced by Socrates.

1. “There was never a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.” Where do we see this happening today and how is it happening?

2. What were the strengths and weaknesses in Athenian democracy? What shaped it?

- From the beginning of the sixth century to the end of the fifth, democracy evolved in Athens. The inspiration for democracy came not only from Athens, but also from Jerusalem. Jerusalem gave us three key insights into democracy.
- The first is that all individuals are in the image of God and therefore of dignity, worth and value. Collapse and trauma were experienced in the destruction of Jerusalem and exile in Babylon. Marduk the Babylonian God was supreme, as were the Babylonians. The Hebrew exiles had to reimagine the Sacred and their place in the world. Poets came up with a mytho-poem and when they put their sacred writings together, they placed the mytho-poem at the beginning of their collected writings. This is Genesis 1.
- The Near-East believed that only the king was in the image of God. This created a hierarchical, patriarchal social order. Inequality was built into the systems of society. In the Genesis poem all are in the image of God and there is principled equality and dignity of all without exception. Democracy emerged out of the Hebrew vision of every individual made in the image of God and every individual of equal worth and dignity.
- The second insight is in the word play in Genesis. Adam is the Hebrew for human and Adamah is Hebrew for earth, soil, dirt, dust. Every individual made in the image of God is an Earthling. There is a radical equality, but the profound insight applies to climate change, environmental destruction and the collapse of ecological systems. All of nature has intrinsic value, dignity and worth. In eco-democracy the entire community of life has value, rights, dignity and worth.
- The third insight found in the Hebrew prophetic tradition concerns justice. Socrates was committed to critical questioning; the Hebrew prophets were committed to justice for all. The prophetic passion was for social, political and economic justice, which had its roots in every person in the image of God. It was also rooted in the Exodus narrative of liberation from the social, political and economic oppression and exploitation of Pharaoh.
- Cornel West describes this commitment of the prophets to justice as "one of the great moral moments in history".

(Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism*, 2004, p 17).

- Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others challenged systems of injustice, especially economic injustice. Justice, a vision of God's justice, was all about equality but God was on the side of the poor. The prophets were committed to compassionate justice and just compassion.

- By compassion they meant tenacious solidarity and by justice they meant restorative, social justice. There is no democracy without social justice for all, underpinned by compassion or tenacious solidarity with all.
- We are heirs to the traditions of Athens and Jerusalem. The inspiration and vision of democracy are rooted in Athens and Jerusalem. We are Greek and Jewish inspired to work for the perennial renewal and development of democracy.

1. What are the strengths of the mytho-poem in Genesis 1 in relation to democracy?
2. Why are the Hebrew prophets significant for democracy? Have we forgotten the contribution to democracy of Jerusalem?

Adapted from Johnston McMaster, *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, Chapter 9. (Forthcoming publication)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – In small groups share your thoughts on the practice of democracy in Ireland and the UK?**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – The State of Democracy**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback and discussion**	15 mins
5	**Input 2 – Elements of Democracy**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

- We have been inspired by Athens and Jerusalem. Greek *demokratia* = power of the people.
  - *Demos* = the common people. Democracy = the power of the common people.
  - Greek *kosmopolites* = citizens of the world. Global citizens and now Earth citizens.
- Australian experiment. Two party system not working, "…party government system out of date...25 million people into two doesn't go".

  (Tim Dunlop, *Voices of Us: The Independents' Movement Transforming Australian Democracy*, 2022, p 8).

- In response to increasing inequality and power imbalances in Australia, grassroots organisations growing - kitchen table meetings. Talking now of citizens' juries, community assemblies and deliberative polls.
- German-speaking region of Belgium - a permanent citizens' assembly - 24 citizens who serve for 18 months. Participative and deliberative democracy are crucial to the practice of democracy.
- The *American Declaration of Independence* began with 'We the People', though that was confined to males and white people. It was shaped in no small way by the Scottish Enlightenment and, in particular, by an Irish Presbyterian, Francis Hutcheson.
- Hutcheson grew up near Carryduff and taught philosophy at Glasgow University. At the heart of his philosophy was treating everyone as someone of value. As an ordained Presbyterian minister and son of a Presbyterian minister he probably was familiar with every human person in the image of God from the Hebrew poem of Genesis.
- Freedom of opinion and religious tolerance were radical ideas of Hutcheson but perhaps the most radical idea in his philosophy was the right to resist tyranny. If trust between the governed and those who govern breaks down, if the common good of civil society breaks down, there is the right and obligation to resist.
- Hutcheson's philosophy was that sovereignty lay not with monarchs or governments, but with people. Power belongs to the people, is derived from the people, and is only and always exercised by the consent of the people. This is the fundamental principle of responsibility and accountability.

- Politicians are not the elite and the weakness in our practice of democracy may be our representative democracy where we vote people in and leave them to get on with governance and legislation.
- But power lies with the people and politicians are always answerable and accountable to the people. 'We the People' as a more authentic expression of democracy, would change the working of our politics, governing and legislative bodies. And that calls for more participative and deliberative democracy, more civic fora, citizens' assemblies, civic conversations, kitchen table discussions.

1. We are the heirs of Athens and Jerusalem. How important are these two traditions to our practice of democracy?
2. How significant is the philosophy of Francis Hutcheson to our practice of democracy and democratic accountability?

- Beyond the Vote and Majoritarianism

  Democracy is the rule of the majority but majoritarianism can become a tyranny, dominating, side-lining and silencing minorities. The elimination of dissent is the diminution of democracy.

- Human Rights

  At the heart of liberal democracy are human rights. Rights call abuses of power and domination into question.

  There is not a culture of rights in Northern Ireland. Struggle to establish a Bill of Rights. Human rights are an essential part of democracy.

- The Rule of Law

  Independent judiciary important. The state is not above the law. The difference between good and bad government is the rule of law. Corruption in government can be called out and named. Where corruption or rule of law flouted, democracy is diminished.

- Democratic Accountability

  Accountability built into parliamentary systems. For the Greeks *demokratia* was 'power of the people' and one of the meanings of the Greek for justice, *dike*, meant trial, verdict or judgement.

  Core to Frances Hutcheson's thinking - everyone of value, freedom of opinion and religious tolerance. His most radical idea was the right to resist tyranny. Sovereignty lies not with monarchs or governments, but with people.

- Pluralist Democracy

  Democracy is pluralist. Similar to the church's word catholic = here comes everybody. Pluralism is a fact of life, constitutive of life in the universe. Pluralism is core to democracy and the practice of democracy.

  Northern Ireland has lived in binary captivity. Pluralist democracy has never worked but demographics are changing, binaries being rejected.

  All are equal before the law, and all are equal in dignity and worth. All entitled to rights and voices. Legislators legislate for a pluralist society and not for narrow party ideological interests or a single religious interest.

- Participatory Democracy

  Representative democracy where we elect politicians to represent us and to legislate for the common good. Do party politics or two-party politics really work? Democracy is 'rule of the people by the people for the people'.

  Civil society is important to the democratic process. Civil society is key to participatory democracy. Needs local civic fora, regional and local citizens' assemblies, networks of civic conversations, kitchen table discussions where people can engage in participatory democracy.

- Deliberative Democracy

  Broader and wider in scope from participatory democracy. Core values of democracy are justice, human rights and freedom. Deliberative democracy is democratic deliberation and dialogue, to realise economic and social justice, and where all can live in responsible freedom. It requires mechanisms and structures across the intercultural realities of society.

  We need democratic networks across borders, boundaries and traditions, cultural and religious. Absolute national sovereignty has long gone and attempts to recover it in today's globalised and interdependent world are delusional.

  "...democracy is based on the centrality of both action and interaction in social life, and necessarily also involves the intense interaction among existing communities within a more interconnected world."

  (Carol Gould, *Interactive Democracy: The Social Roots of Global Justice*, 2014, p 269).

  Deliberative democracy is the practice of democracy with a heart, democracy with values, not only justice and freedom, but democracy with compassion or compassionate democracy.

1. What are the challenges we face with pluralist democracy? How much pluralism can we cope with in our practice of democracy?
2. What can we do to ensure a more participatory and deliberative democracy?

Adapted from Johnston McMaster, *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, Chapter 10. (Forthcoming publication)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – In small groups discuss the role of politics in society.**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Educating for Politics: What is Politics?**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback and discussion**	15 mins
5	**Input 2 – Covenantal Politics**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

- "I am not interested in politics, but politics is interested in you."
  "Everything is politics but politics is not everything."
- Once humankind formed communities, there was the need to organise and create systems of power, management of resources, an economy, a way of living together, and rules for getting along with each other.

1. Political Speak

- The Greeks gave us words: politics, democracy, aristocracy, tyranny; and we have identified with their political ideals: freedom, independence and self-government.
- *Civitas* - political unit we call the state
- *Demokratia* - power of the people
- *Turannos* – tyranny
- *Polis* - city-state, the unit of political activity
- *Politeia* - citizenship
- The Greeks had the polis up and running by 600 BCE - lasted two centuries.
- Aristotle insisted the polis must be built on justice. Citizens were to live just lives.

2. Political Populism

- 2016 -election of Trump and Brexit. Bitter campaigns and divisive.
- Diminishing trust in governments.
- Global loss among young people of faith in democracy, human rights and free elections.
- Strongmen politics and populism promise a return to greatness.
- Plato – "democracy would always degenerate into tyranny".
- "Remove the moral matrix of civil society and eventually you get populist politics and the death of freedom in the name of freedom."
  (Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, 2020, p 129).

3. The State and Politics

- The state is the location of the supreme power within a society. Society acting as a whole. Political conflict is normal and dissent is healthy.
- Critical awareness of the myth or fiction of sovereignty is key. There is no absolute sovereignty in an interdependent world. The exercise of absolute power is a domination system, an imperium. Sovereignty lies with 'we the people'. Power sharing is a normal part of the polis, locally and globally.

4. Politics Matters

- We all have political responsibility and need an active civic society. Politics is not a spectator sport. It needs participatory and deliberative democracy. We live in a messy world and why should politics be any less messy? The same with religion, humanistic and secular.
- Foundation stone of democratic politics is compromise. Politics is the art of the possible and nothing is possible without compromise. Red lines become the negation of politics.
- No politics without dialogue and democratic politics is acceptance of difference, constitutive of human and ecological existence. Politics is civilizing and civility a mark of public discourse.
- "Politics is a way of ruling divided societies without undue violence."

  (Matthew Flinders, *Defending Politics: Why Democracy Matters in the 21st century*, 2012, p 185).
- Ethically, compromise, conciliation, reconciliation is better than coercion or imposed cultural, social and political hegemony.

1. If we remove the moral matrix of civil society, what kind of politics are we likely to have?
2. Why is the sharing of power an important part of democratic politics? Do we have this in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the UK?
3. If politics is a way of ruling divided societies without undue violence, what kind of politics is needed to achieve this?

- There is a history of covenant and politics in north-east Ireland and the US. The idea derives from the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Hebrew-Jewish imagination covenant is a socio-political idea and essentially an economic vision.
- "Covenant is what we have in common despite our differences. It speaks to us as active citizens sharing collective responsibility. It is not the politics of 'Us' against 'Them'; it is the politics of all-of-us-together."

  (Sacks, *Morality*, 2020, p 333).
- "A covenantal politics would emphasise our responsibilities to one another."

  (Sacks, *Morality*, 2020, p 334).
- Another word for covenant is neighbourliness, and neighbourliness is inclusive, no one is left out.
- "A covenant creates a moral community. It binds people together in a bond of mutual responsibility and care."

  (Sacks, *Morality*, 2020, p 327).
- "The politics of covenant does not demean or ridicule opponents. It honours the process of reasoning together. It gives special concern to those who most need help, and special honour to those who most give help."

  (Sacks, *Morality*, 2020, p 335).
- Perhaps on this island and elsewhere we need a new covenant, a new kind of inclusive neighbourly politics that really matters and brings us closer to a common good.

1. What would it mean to have covenantal politics?

Adapted from Johnston McMaster, *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, Chapter 11. (Forthcoming publication)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – In small groups discuss what justice means to you.**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – A Politics of Justice**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback and discussion**	15 mins
5	**Input 2 – The Hebrew Prophets and the Core Values of Social Justice**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

- Democratic politics is about living in community where priority is given to reason, open-mindedness and fairness. Democratic politics practices moderation, cooperation, negotiation, bargaining, compromise and accommodation. Not majoritarian democracy but egalitarian democracy. Democratic politics is all working together for the common good.
- Justice was key for Athens and Jerusalem. Athens and Jerusalem were concerned with ethics, and both were advocates for social justice. Justice was their core ethical value.
- The Greeks gifted us four classical virtues : wisdom, justice, courage and moderation. For Cicero, ethics are paramount, and the foundation of ethics is reason and natural sociability. The four Greek virtues are personal qualities within the concentric circles of social connection.
- Justice is the big virtue or foundational virtue. For Aristotle, justice is the distribution of authority and power according to political virtue. "States are only just if their citizens lead just lives."

  (Alan Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*, 2012, pp 79-80).
- How is authority and power distributed or organised in our society and is it according to political virtue? Do we lack the classical political virtues?
- The Greeks brought together democracy, politics and ethics, but were not the first. Ethics and justice were in existence since the 18th century BCE, 1,500 years before Solon and 500 years before the earliest Hebrew leader, Moses.
- Hammurabi was a king of Babylon, the earliest Babylonian Empire. And in the 18th century BCE he wrote to proclaim himself as promoting the welfare of the people, "… to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil that the strong might not oppress the weak...That justice might be dealt to the orphan and the widow".

  (John J. Collins, *What Are Biblical Values? What the Bible says on Key Ethical Issues*, 2019, p 171).
- Kings were called by the gods to ensure justice for the vulnerable and weak. Earlier than Hammurabi, a prince of Lagash in 2430 BCE was said to: "...establish liberation for Lagash. To the mother he restored her children, and to the children he restored their mother. He instituted liberation for the interest on barley".

  (John J. Collins, *What Are Biblical Values?* 2019, p 172).

- Over a millennium before Athens and Jerusalem leaders were talking of widows and orphans and justice and this became the language used often in the Hebrew prophets and Deuteronomy.

1. What do the four cardinal Greek virtues, namely: wisdom, courage, moderation and justice, bring to our politics?
2. For the Greeks ethics and virtues were personal within concentric circles of sociability. What might this mean for the practice of politics and deliberative politics?

- Hebrew kings were also mandated to do justice for the poor. Justice was to be at the heart of a good reign. Most were responsible for injustices and Solomon built an empire riddled with injustices. On his death there was a tax revolt and the empire fell apart.
- Much of the history of ancient Israel was of repeated injustices and the voices of protest were Amos, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah. They critiqued serious injustices and called for social justice that they believed was the very nature of God. They are concerned that the poor are being deprived of the rights and necessities of life and are being left to live in subhuman conditions. They are calling for a justice of self-sufficiency, the justice of enough for all.
- "For in the Hebrew Bible, no value is more central or fundamental than the demand for social justice."

  (John J. Collins, *What Are Biblical Values?* 2019, p 177).
- Whether the voice of Jeremiah, or an editor or editors, the one keyway to know God, to be aware and know the Sacred in life, is to do justice.
- The social justice of the prophets is rooted in the paradigmatic experience of Exodus, the liberation of slaves from the political, economic and cultural oppression of Egypt.
- Justice is distributive justice, and in the prophets there is no clash with retributive justice. There is retributive justice, but the primary justice is social or distributive justice.
- This is what we mean by the Judeo-Christian tradition and its impact and influence on our history and life together. Calls in Europe to restore the Judeo-Christian tradition are for white, Christian supremacy and not for subversive, distributive social justice.
- What does justice mean for the homeless? What does justice mean for the have-nots? What does justice say to an educational system that produces the lowest levels of attainment in Europe? What does it mean to do justice for the poor and vulnerable of our society and world? For those with long-term chronic health issues and shorter lifespans than the better-off? What does justice mean for politics mired in sectarianism, where sectional party ideology cannot vision or work together for a common good. What does eco-justice look like? What do just politics look like?

1. What does justice mean for the homeless, the have-nots, the poor and vulnerable, the sick, the political system, and the environment?
2. Is just politics possible in our context? For our future?

Adapted from Johnston McMaster, *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, Chapter 12. (Forthcoming publication)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – In your small groups share your understanding of the term citizenship**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Educating for Citizenship: Citizens of the Earth**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback and discussion**	15 mins
5	**Input 2 – Active Citizens of the Earth**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

- "In relation to the state, citizenship is about voting, knowing our rights and understanding (the states) political structures. In relation to society, citizenship is quite different. It involves helping others, giving to charitable causes, volunteering and community service."

  (Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society*, 2007, pp 183-184).

- When the Greeks invented democracy and politics, they went beyond the local. *Kosmopolites* = citizens of the world. We need larger horizons, more expansive worldviews and more liberated identities. *Kosmos* = the universe. We are citizens of the Earth and more.

- The Hebrews shaped an ethical insight. A creative wordplay in Genesis 2. Adam -*Adamah* - the human and the Earth are one. Latin - human and *humus*. We are earthlings. *Kosmopolites* = citizens of the Earth.

- Vaclev Havel - we have lost integrity. Homo Sapiens "regards itself as the pinnacle of creation and the Lord of the world".

  (Havel quoted in Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Honouring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Way*, 2013, p 112).

- Modern anthropocentrism is deeply, fatally flawed and is to be rejected. Science is now "...anchoring man (sic) once more in the cosmos".

  (Havel quoted in Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Honouring Faith*, 2013, pp 112-113).

- To be Earth citizens we need to be anchored again in the cosmos and to be shaped and sustained by a web-of-life sacramental ethics.

- Three moments of earth-human transformation:
  1. 10,000 BCE agricultural revolution led to settled societies. 3000-1000 BCE humans-built cities, shaped religions and philosophies. Powerful elites emerged as did standing armies.
  2. Industrial Revolution. Humans exploited the stored energy of the Earth, fossil fuels of oil, coal and natural gas. Illusion of controlling earth and liberating humankind. Also, no limits to fossil fuels and Earth's resources. No earth-human relationship.
  3. Energy-Climate-Era. Moving from technozoic to an ecozoic era. The house is still burning. The wealthy, powerful nations are responsible for the blaze. Military budgets and militarism are the worst offenders, the chief arsonists.

- "...We are living in the most important and challenging moment in the history of Homo Sapiens, more important than any of our wars...We have to consciously practice restraint to end our 'use it till it's gone' way of life. We have to stop our deficit spending of the ecosphere and reduce our numbers if we hope to prevent widespread socio-political upheaval."

(Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Honouring Faith*, 2013, p 59).

1. “Modern anthropocentrism is deeply, fatally flawed” (Vaclav Havel). What does it mean then to be human?
2. What does it mean to be anchored again in the cosmos? What would it mean to restore the integrity of creation?

- Citizenship is the recognition of our co-dependence on one another and that we have a 'creative capacity for choice'. As citizens of the Earth, we choose sustainability citizenship action. None of this citizenship of the Earth is separate from politics, economics and ethics.

- Religion has been criticised for being passive, otherworldly and calling for obedience and submission. It does not empower sustainability citizenship action. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's critique. "Only wanderers...who love the Earth and God as one, can believe in God's kingdom."

(Dietric Bonhoeffer, "*Thy Kingdom Come! The Prayer of the Church-Community for God's Kingdom on Earth*", 1932, quoted in Rasmussen, *Earth Honouring* Faith, 2013, p 84).

- Bonhoeffer totally repudiated otherworldly Christianity. "We have been otherworldly ever since we hit on the trick of being religious, even 'Christian' at the expense of the Earth..."

(Bonhoeffer quoted in Rasmussen, *Earth Honouring* Faith, 2013, p 84).

- Bonhoeffer was describing an escapist religion, religion as a narcotic, Marx's opium of the people, otherworldly Christianity. Love of God and love of the earth are inseparable. We can't love one without the other and if love expressed publicly is justice, then we are doers of social and eco-justice.

- Jonathan Sacks draws attention to Deuteronomy 20 v19-20, known as the rule of *bal tashhit*, 'do not destroy.' Forbidding a scorched earth policy. "This is the halakhic basis of an ethic of environmental responsibility."

(Jonathan Sacks, *Essays on Ethics*, 2016, p 300).

- The Judeo-Christian tradition is rooted in the Jewish Torah and the Torah is very much concerned with sustainability. Shabbat, the Sabbatical year, and the Jubilee year -limits to intervention in nature and the pursuit of economic growth.

- We know "...about the dangers to the earth's ecology by the ceaseless pursuit of economic gain...We should expand our horizons of environmental responsibility (and add our Earth citizenship) for the sake of generations not yet born".

(Sacks, *Essay on Ethics*, 2016, p 304).

- Earth Charter of 2000 was a declaration of fundamental values and principles for a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the twenty-first century.

- Four Pillars:
    1. Respect and Care for the Community of Life
    2. Ecological Integrity
    3. Social and Economic Justice
    4. Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace

- Charter described as an important example of "…wisdom-in-the-making as the practical wisdom for ecological rather than industrial civilization". And, "Wisdom's dream of a common earth ethic and the unity of humankind is at least as old as the Hebrew prophets, Confucius, the Buddha, and Plato. That should surprise no one since religions, together with ancient philosophies and the primordial visions of First Peoples, have consistently staked out the audacious claim that 'community' not only includes Earth as a whole but the cosmos."

  (Rasmussen, *Earth Honouring* Faith, 2013, pp 118-119, 344).

- The wisdom and pillars of the Earth Charter and the wisdom of the ages can inform and shape us as active citizens of the Earth.

1. What does it mean to be Citizens of the Earth and to choose sustainability citizenship action?
2. In what ways can the Earth Charter shape us as Citizens of the Earth and shape actions and policies?

Adapted from Johnston McMaster, *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, Chapter 13. (Forthcoming publication)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – Is citizenship important? Share in your small group your thoughts on this question?**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Active Citizenship and Collective Responsibility**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback and discussion**	15 mins
5	**Input 2 – Being Human, Being Citizens**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

- The important lessons from the past, from history, are that nothing is guaranteed, nothing is inevitable, and the future is a surprise. Eastern and Central Europe in 1989 was a surprise. Sometimes a future breaks out that no one saw coming or expected.
- We live in interesting and challenging times. There are many questions about the future: Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, the monarchy, the future of Europe and the future of the planet? What is citizenship today and citizens of what?
- The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is clear that no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Less noticed is the clause about citizenship.
- "It is the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify as Irish or British, or both as they may choose, and therefore confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland".

  (Article 1 (vi) Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, 1998).
- The last part of the sentence is the least noticed.
- "Northerners will have an enduring birthright to identify as British or Irish, or both, as they do now within the United Kingdom. They will also have the right to dual citizenship…."

  (Brendan O'Leary, *Making Sense of a United Ireland*, 2022, p 293).
- Whatever the future, Northerners have the enduring right to hold forever British citizenship. In an integrated or federal Ireland, if that is democratically voted for, British citizenship is not Ireland's to give but to recognise. A constitutional duty of recognition might need to be legislated.
- Unionists may not be interested in any of this, and some may not accept any democratic decision. But democracy, responsible citizenship and collective wellbeing belong together.
- Whatever surprise the future has, we are still going to have to work out what being citizens means and what civic responsibility means.

1. History teaches us that nothing is guaranteed, nothing is inevitable, and the future is a surprise. What might this mean in our context?
2. "...their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland."
   (Article 1 (vi), Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, 1998).

   Is that agreement helpful, acceptable, liberating?

- Aristotle gave shape to citizenship. Good citizenship means being truly human and exercising virtue. But Aristotle did not think that all could be truly human. Women and slaves were not.

1. Citizenship for All:

- Aristotle put limits on citizenship. Do we not practice a limited citizenship? Who are the excluded in our citizenship praxis? There are class, racial and ethnic limitations on citizenship. Discrimination also and denial of citizenship on the basis of religion. Class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender differences and sexual orientation are barriers imposed by us on those who are not like us becoming active citizens.
- Who are the excluded from citizenship in Ireland, Britain? Who do we want to treat as less than human, and therefore as less than citizens? Who are our second-class citizens, if citizens at all? Democracy means citizenship is for all and all share responsibility for each other, for the flourishing and wellbeing of all.
- If the Greeks didn't see it that way, the Hebrews did. In Babylonian exile they asserted that not just the king but that every human being and humans together were in the image of God. Equality of human worth and dignity and the equality of every human to be citizen, and to be responsible for each other and for life together.
- In Brazil citizenship has become a key term for democracy. Citizenship is about having the right to have rights. "The greatest flaw in Latin American nations is the lack of citizenship."

  (Rudolf von Sinner, *Public Theology in the Secular State: A Perspective from the Global South*, 2021, p 41).

- "At the same time, as the poor have become 'discardable' by the dominant neo-liberal market capitalism, they only come into sight for those 'converted to solidarity."

  (Hugo Assmann quoted in Von Sinner, *Public Theology in the Secular State*, 2021, p 44).

- Assmann has stressed educating for solidarity and as a public theologian he wants to underline the importance of social conversion. We are converted to solidarity, to communitarian relationships. It is necessary to "…join values of solidarity with effective rights of citizenship".

  (Assmann quoted in Von Sinner, *Public Theology in the Secular State*, 2021, p 44).

- In Northern Ireland/Ireland there is the need for educating for solidarity, social conversion, to become newly orientated to communitarian relationships rather than class, and tribal sectarian relationships. There is the need to bring together in consciousness, attitudes, behaviours, actions and life praxis, and in our social structures, the values of solidarity with effective rights of citizenship. An inclusive citizenship of solidarity.

2. Covenantal Citizenship and Politics

Covenant is the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition and covenantal politics is:

- "...by definition, a politics of responsibility. It is created by an act of commitment. The people undertake to abide by a moral code, pursue a moral vision and create a society built on justice, compassion and respect for human dignity...Covenants are among people strongly committed to freedom, equality and dignity."

  (Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society*, 2007, p 123).

- "A covenantal society is a moral community, future-orientated, goal directed whose citizens are on a journey towards a destination."

  (Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, 2007, p 125).

- Twenty-five years on from the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement where are we? Are we now or are we yet a moral community, future-orientated, goal-directed with citizens and politicians moving towards a destination?

- "This is what citizenship in a covenanted society is: co-responsibility for justice, equity, kindness and compassion."

  (Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, 2007, p 126).

- Athens' reminder that we are *kosmopolites*, citizens of the world and citizens of the Earth. Parochialism kills us.

1. What would it mean to have a citizenship of solidarity? Or a conversion to solidarity?
2. Are we yet a moral community, future-orientated, goal-directed whose citizens are on a journey towards a destination? Can we get there?
3. What are the values that underpin covenantal politics and citizenship? How can we be *kosmopolites*, citizens of the world and how might that liberate us?

Adapted from Johnston McMaster, *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, Chapter 14. (Forthcoming publication)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – How important are values to the practice of democracy? Share your thoughts on this question in your small group.**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – Educating for Values, Morally Grounded Politics: The Practice of Politics in Deuteronomy**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback and discussion**	15 mins
5	**Input 2 – Freedom and Morally Grounded Economics**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

- As Europeans we are who we are because of the Greek humanist tradition, the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Islamic tradition.
- Christianity in the European and north Atlantic history has denied and/or distorted Jewish roots. This is being recovered. An exploration of politics and democracy can look at the practice of politics in Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Jewish Torah.
- In the Gospels the most frequently quoted and alluded to books from the Hebrew Bible are Deuteronomy and Isaiah. For the early Jesus Movement Deuteronomy was an important source for their social practice.
- How do Jewish people read Deuteronomy? It is a religious book in the context of social organisation and structures of power, politics, economics and culture. "It is absurd to suppose that people can reach spiritual heights if they lack the most basic material necessities."

  (Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation: Deuteronomy: Renewal of the Sinai Covenant, 2019, p 2).
- The book of Deuteronomy is a programme for a good society. Deuteronomy is "about the creation of a good society based on collective responsibility".

  (Sacks, Covenant and Conversation: Deuteronomy, 2019, p 2).
- Justice is concrete practice built into the legal, social, economic, political and power structures of society.
- Today is a word frequently used in Deuteronomy and Luke's Gospel because the emphasis is on the contemporary, what covenant means now. When the Hebrews shaped covenant they broke away from hierarchies, monarchies and political elitism. Covenant was about a radically different arrangement of economic power. Deuteronomy is essentially an economic text.

- Sacks identifies five dimensions of covenantal politics rooted in Torah and Deuteronomy.
    1. It is a politics of collective responsibility. Deuteronomy 19 vv. 9-10. Everybody involved.
    2. It is a politics rooted in the principled equality of the dignity of all citizens.
    3. It is a moral politics. The benchmark of accountability is justice as equity and fairness for all.
    4. It is a politics rooted not in power but in a mutual pledge, all citizens pledged to each other and the common good.
    5. It is a politics rooted in remembrance and covenantal renewal. Renewal of pledge to each other in solidarity and commitment to just, compassionate and inclusive common good society.

(Sacks, Covenant and Conversation: Deuteronomy, 2019, pp 59-60).

1. The foundation of a society of the common good is justice. What does that mean for our society?
2. Reflect on the five dimensions of covenantal politics rooted in Torah and Deuteronomy and their implications for the politics of our society.

- As Europeans we have come out of a history of brutality, violence and war. Also, a history of ideas, innovation and the development of democratic, political and economic systems and ways of organising human life together. European imperialism, Industrial Revolutions, Renaissance, Reformations and the Enlightenment. All significant movements that have shaped lives together.

- In 1439 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. Literacy and knowledge exploded. Bibles were translated into the vernacular and put into the hands of the people and that was incendiary, explosive and let loose a political and economic revolution.

- A group of thinkers called the Christian Hebraists realised the radical power of the Hebrew tradition and that the Bible was a book about highly charged politics. This shaped a new democracy and a new politics. Sacks summarises three dynamic political thoughts of the Christian Hebraists.
    1. They were republican rather than royalist or monarchist. They realised that ancient Israel's demand for a monarchy, a king, was a disaster.
    2. The heart of the Hebraists biblical political politics was that government has the task of redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor. The Greeks and Romans had never thought of that.
    3. The Christian Hebraists saw that the Hebrew Bible had a separation of powers between the king and the high priest. These 17C thinkers were well ahead of the 19C and 20C secular and its separation of church and state.

- "It was this historic encounter between Christians and the Hebrew Bible in the seventeenth century that led to the birth of liberty in both England and America. The Calvinists and Puritans who led both the English and American Revolutions were saturated in the politics of the Hebrew Bible, especially the book of Deuteronomy."

  (Sacks, Covenant and Conversation: Deuteronomy, 2019, pp 60-61).

- Core idea of freedom, the paradigm of Exodus and the midwives protest role against the tyranny of Pharoah. The truth of Moses was that a just society with human dignity and freedom is the great objective and possibility. The Moses of Deuteronomy says to a people, 'you are free'. The people are free to choose. "Choice is written into the human condition."

  (Sacks, Covenant and Conversation: Deuteronomy, 2019, p 121).

- In Deuteronomy the covenantal initiative is not with God but with the people. They decide their future.
- The other truth of Moses is that we are collectively responsible. All are responsible for one another. Collective responsibility means a choice for participative and deliberative democracy.
- Deuteronomy is an economic text. Covenant is an economic vision. Deuteronomy is about the economic basis of life together, the economic rights of people. Economic rights were missing from the American Bill of Rights amendments to the Constitution. The key covenantal texts are Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and economic rights are central.
- In the ten words from Sinai, seven "were fundamental principles of social policy intended to protect people's rights, rights that were basically economic".

(Richard Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All*, 2009, p 1).

- Freedom has been applied to the market, free market economy and free trade. A dogma of economics. Market has lifted over a hundred million people out of poverty in India and a billion in China.
- The insight of Deuteronomy is that economics need morals. "Without morals, markets cannot function...Markets need morals, and morals are not made by markets."

(Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, 2020, p 96).

- Schools, media, custom and tradition make morals. It is an ongoing process. Religion can contribute to moral formation. Religions are communities of moral formation and moral values that are social and ecological.

1. The Christian Hebraists discovered the politics of the Hebrew Bible and Deuteronomy. What are the implications of their discovery for democratic politics today?
2. Markets need morals. What morals do markets need; and how are morals shaped?

Adapted from Johnston McMaster, *Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics*, Chapter 15. (Forthcoming publication)

Session Outline

1	**Introductory exercise – In your small group share your thoughts on the core values for a common good society.**	10 mins
2	**Input 1 – A More Excellent Way: The Human Political Values of 1 Corinthians 13**	10 mins
3	**Group discussion**	15 mins
4	**Feedback and discussion**	15 mins
5	**Input 2 – The Ethics of Civil Democracy**	10 mins
6	**Group discussion**	15 mins
7	**Feedback and plenary discussion**	15 mins

- Athens and Jerusalem had morals and values for the social organisation of people together. They came at ethics, social values and virtues from different angles. We draw from a deep well of morals, ethics and values without which there is no real democracy, politics and citizenship.

1. Everything is Politics but Politics is not Everything

- All that makes for a good life together needs politics. Liberal democracy emerged and saw politics as necessary, but not everything. There is something more than politics. There is such a thing as society but who creates society, government or us?
- Civil society is important as part of a democracy. Healthy democracy needs strong civil society.
- The Judeo-Christian tradition has shaped the secular in our European experience, and we need to grasp the ironies and complexities of the Judeo-Christian inheritance.
- The Bible has a strange fascination with diversity. The prologue to the Hebrew Bible is not about Jews but humankind. The Exodus from Egypt is not a 'Jews only' group. The nation of 'biblical Israel' is not ethnic but civic.
- Leviticus 25 expresses purity concerns and not morality. It does have something to say about the resident alien or stranger. Minorities are included and their rights are of major significance. They share fully in civil and political society.
- The Babel myth is a critique of empire, domination systems and a critique of uniformity. "Biblical politics is about living with difference."
  (Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, 2007, p 99).
- In a sectarian society we have not been able to live with differences. We create society, not the politicians, and we need to create the diverse, inclusive, common good society.

2. Civility as an Ethic for Life Together

- In Northern Ireland politics have always lacked democracy and often civility. The death of civility in politics and in civil society is a serious matter and destructive of democracy. Civility has been described as "…the sum of the many sacrifices we are called on to make for the sake of living together".

  (Stephen Carter quoted in Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, 2007, p 183).

- If we want a common good, we need civility. We do not want a homogenous, uniform or conformist society. "Civility allows us to negotiate disagreements...is an ethic of dealing with strangers...a code for the gracious coexistence of difference."

  (Edward Shils quoted in Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, 2007, p189, p185).

- We are free to choose civility, to practice civility and to put the ethic of civility at the heart of civil society, politics and democracy.

1. Everything is politics but politics is not everything. What does this mean and what is the something more?
2. Is diversity too much of a threat? What does it mean to 'love the stranger'?
3. How can we restore civility to our politics and civil society?

- Paul wrote four or five letters to the Corinthians faith community. In one of the letters, he sets out 'a more excellent way'. The Greek human virtues were temperance, courage, prudence and justice.
- Paul's virtues, which he may have borrowed from the Greeks, are in I Corinthians 13 vv. 4-7.
- Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- Are these the essential disciplines of democracy? The virtues of a civil society and disciplines for political practice?
  - Love is patient may sound like a cop-out.
  - Love is kind is beyond niceness.
  - Love that is not jealous or boastful, arrogant or rude may seem incompatible with politics.
  - Love that does not insist on its own way...is open to compromise.
  - Love that is not irritable or resentful enhances the political and democratic processes.
  - Love does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right, usually finds it difficult at the misfortune of others, or in their defeat, or even their success.
  - Bearing all things and enduring all things is a prerequisite for a democratic society.
  - Love believes all things is not an invitation to incredulity or gullibility. Openness to change.
  - Love hopes all things. Loving others enough to want and believe good things can happen.
  - Change and transformation take time. Hope needed to keep going, believing that the good is possible. We do not despair of relative possibilities within history.
  - Love is seeking the highest good of the other and love in public is justice for all.
- The poem is for those places and relationships where civil society takes shape and in public and community life where civility is key.

1. Reflect on Paul's poem of civil democracy and ethic of civility. What difference would these virtues/values make?

Course 1:

Integrated Reconciliation: A Common Good Vision for Society.
A Series of Seven Civic Conversations
by Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster

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Title Page for Course 3:
Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics -
A Series of Eight Civic Conversations by Johnston McMaster

Session 1 - Democracy Matters: Inspired by Athens and Jerusalem

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This educational resource contains three civic conversation courses, which have been designed to provide opportunities for learning, understanding and action to enhance the common good on the island of Ireland. This resource is a fourth publication developed from the Irish School of Ecumenics project, 'Is There A Common Good?'.

The first two courses are entitled: 'Integrated Reconciliation: A Common Good Vision for Society' and 'Valuing the Common Good'. They include reflections and learnings from three years of field research and education, through civic conversations, with people across Northern Ireland and the border counties.

The emphasis in the first course is on exploring the common good through the prism of reconciliation and the six integrated strands: the socio-political, the socio-economic, the socio-environmental, the socio-legal, the socio-psychological and the socio-spiritual. The six integrated strands provide a template for social reconciliation locally and globally. The second course explores what it means to live common good values and the implications for local, national and international common good actions that go beyond words.

The third course titled: 'Democracy Matters: Beyond Religious Nationalism to Just Politics', develops the common good conversation further. The focus is on enabling a practice of democracy that is participatory, deliberative and radically inclusive, with implications for active citizenship and collective responsibility.

This civic educational resource is for those engaged in community relations, community development and community education. It can be adapted for schools and further education colleges, and help facilitate conversations in religious and political sectors, as well as within intercultural organisations. The courses can equip participants to become practitioners of reconciliation and peace building, as essential components of a common good society.