

PILGRIM CATHOLIC

Newsletter of the Gypsy & Traveller Support Network

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May 3rd 2008 - Lord Avebury with some Dale Farm residents and Ann after opening the Dale Farm Community Association Training Centre.

Travellers on Dale Farm Get Reprieve

On 9 May 2008, a High Court Judgment found in favour of Traveller families who were residents of Dale Farm, Billericay and Five Acres Farm, Wickford and against Basildon Council who was seeking to evict them. The land in question was in the green belt and planning permission had been refused by the Council. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) intervened in the case as the body with responsibility to review the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) and specifically the public duty under s.71(1) of the Act.

In his Judgment, Mr Justice Collins noted that the problems created by the lack of sufficient authorised sites for Travellers and Gypsies are 'too frequently all but insoluble'. Nonetheless, he went to say that local authorities have a duty under the Housing Act 2004 (S 225) to produce a strategy for the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers and that the prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers and the opposition to planning permission often voiced by local communities may not always be for reasons that are substantive.

The Judgment summarised recent legislation bearing on these matters, especially Circular 01/2006 issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 2 February 2006. The Circular was aimed, among other things, at increasing the number of sites with planning permission in appropriate locations and avoiding Gypsies and Travellers becoming homeless through eviction without having an alternative to move to. The Judgment recognises that Basildon Council has provided more sites than its neighbours and has had to cope with an increase in demand far above that which has applied nationally (475% increase in Basildon since 1990, as compared to 50% nationally).

The Judgment amounted to a temporary stay. Mr Justice Collins ended by saying that the Travellers cannot remain where they are indefinitely and that the time must come when they have to leave, either voluntarily or by eviction. Nevertheless, he held that for the moment all relevant matters had not been

properly taken into account. He held that the Council's approach to the need of the Travellers had been too restrictive and that further consideration should be given as to whether any sites can be found in the district and whether any families can be allowed to remain for the time being. For the full text of the Judgment see: www.dglaw.co.uk/files/DaleFarmJudgment090508.doc

Local Parish Supports Travellers on Dale Farm

Ann Kobayashi

Our Lady of Good Counsel parish, Wickford has been very supportive of the Travellers on Dale Farm. The following was written by a parishioner and describes how the positive relationship between the parish and the Travellers evolved. These comments were sent, with a greeting, to the National Gathering of the Catholic Gypsy & Traveller Support Network, which took place on 5th - 6th March 2008 at the Focolare Centre, Welwyn Garden City.

As no-one from Our Lady of Good Counsel parish, Wickford, Essex is able to attend the Gathering this year I am sending these comments as an individual parishioner. I have discussed this briefly with Fr. John Glynn our parish priest but the contents are my sole responsibility.

The Dale Farm Traveller community, Crays Hill is a few miles from Wickford. Over the past 5/6 years I have got to know some of the Travellers as several hundred of them have gradually become part of the parish community. That process hasn't always been easy but it has been interesting as the "settled" parishioners and the Travellers have adapted to sharing a common space for at least a few hours weekly and working through misunderstandings. It is an ongoing process; and the church has provided a meeting place and time to learn about and from each other. Without this, the prejudices of some of the "settled" parishioners and Travellers would never have been challenged.

Our Lady of Good Counsel community comprises a majority of UK/Irish origin with a minority of British Asian, British African, other European and Middle East origin. Prior to the arrival of large numbers of Irish Travellers, parishioners would probably have seen themselves as being a welcoming, reasonably active group which supported a number of humanitarian projects, including: our twin parish of Volkrust, South Africa; an orphanage in Malawi; welfare work in the Philippines; India; CAFOD events/appeals. We have

also held fundraisers for UK charities. Efforts were made to welcome individual new-comers, however the advent of significant numbers of Travellers, perceived as a separate group with different ways of behaving, was for some parishioners akin to an invasion. High levels of noise, people moving around frequently during Mass, litter around the entrance, complaints from residents near the church about inconsiderate vehicle parking, all combined to raise anxiety about the parish profile locally. The degree of distress should not be under-estimated, a few even suggested separate Masses for the Travellers and some parishioners changed to attending a different Mass or a different church.

From the low point described above we "settled" parishioners and Travellers, have come a long way. There have been several factors which together have made this progress possible.

Spiritual leadership

Fr. John Glynn has led by example, welcoming the Travellers, preaching an inclusive model of Christian thought and action and not being afraid to disturb our comfort zone. This has not been an easy road and at times I think, a lonely one. Certainly his work-load has increased enormously. People who have a history of being moved on, tend not to make appointments for several weeks hence. They want an instant response. Baptisms and weddings are requested at short notice, help with various official forms have to be done quickly. The Travellers turn to the priest for help and expect him to be available. Juggling all these expectations with the daily routine of parish and diocesan duties is no mean feat. Saying Mass at Dale Farm on special occasions, holding baptisms during parish Masses, regularly including those Travellers threatened with eviction in the Bidding prayers, remembering those who are sick or have died, have all helped to break down barriers.

Sister Catherine who has special diocesan responsibility for Travellers, has also been tireless in her outreach work and in helping the Traveller community feel more welcome in the parish. Her efforts to help Travellers deal with the various statutory agencies by mediating and negotiating has meant that Sr. Catherine is listened to when she addresses issues of behaviour during Mass and other services. This has resulted in more goodwill and respect all round although again it has been a hard road with conflicting often unreasonable expectations being placed on her by some of the "settled" parishioners and some Travellers. Sr. Catherine has been assisted by some "settled" parishioners in her pastoral work especially with the Traveller children.

As first points of contact Anne Matthews Fr John`s housekeeper, and Karen Sharpe the parish secretary, have helped many Travellers with queries and requests; more importantly their sympathy and warmth have given people a sense of belonging to the parish family.



Liaison with statutory agencies

Fr. John and Sr. Catherine assisted by several health professional parishioners, have been able to make significant interventions to enable the Travellers to access treatment e.g. by offering the church hall as an emergency clinic for mass vaccinations, facilitating health professionals' visits to Dale Farm.

Similar liaison with Essex Fire Service has enabled their dedicated efforts to improve safety especially in the wake of the fatal fire at Dale Farm in 2005, to continue, one result being the co-production with members of the community, of a safety DVD for nation wide distribution.

Several "settled" parishioners have worked as volunteers in Crays Hill school to assist Traveller children with reading programmes.

As a parishioner I attend a quarterly Professionals Forum where representatives of all the statutory agencies involved with Traveller communities in the District, exchange information and ideas.

Support with Planning/Appeal Procedures

Again Fr. John and Sr. Catherine have been fully involved in supporting those 86 families threatened with eviction by Basildon District Council, both through pastoral care and direct representation. With their help I was able to organise a petition signed by 385 members of Wickford and Basildon churches and several Wickford businesses urging the Council to suspend direct action against the Travellers pending further negotiations with the then office of the Deputy

Prime Minister. A lively correspondence with our local MP continues! Some of the Travellers have accompanied me to a meeting of a local Unite Against Fascism group to discuss the situation and so help counter the misleading and sometimes blatantly prejudiced, media stories about them.

With Fr. John I have spoken against the proposed eviction at various Basildon District Council Development and Traffic Management Committee and Full Council meetings, the Secretary of State Inquiry and written to the Press. I have also gone with members of Dale Farm to lobby at Westminster and most recently to attend the High Court Judicial Review.

One aspect of speaking at Council and other official meetings is to remind listeners that it is not the case that the Travellers are somehow unwilling or incapable of being part of a local "settled" community, that the parish is a local community of which they are very much a part.

Faced with the brutal reality of an eviction at Hovefields another site in the area, I was arrested for non-violent direct action-sitting in front of a bulldozer with a friend- and held for 5 hours in police cells. One of the arresting officers asked me "If you're so fond of Travellers why don't you put them up in your living room?" What we did was a short-lived, symbolic protest but on reading the local press report even people who don't approve of non-violent direct action, told me the police response was wholly disproportionate. This gave me an opportunity to ask how proportionate is it to make people homeless, traumatised and at long-term risk of physical and mental ill-health for the sake of preserving a partly ex-brownfield site while far more pristine land has been handed over to commercial and residential property developers despite local protests.

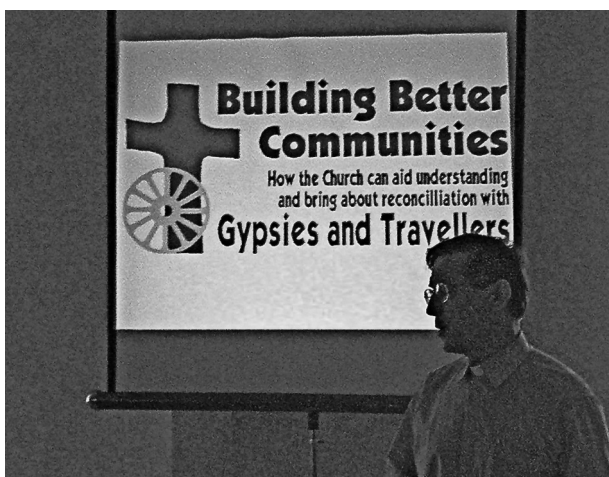
At the Secretary of State Inquiry one Crays Hill village resident asked me why Bishop McMahon didn't house the Travellers on Church ground. Certainly there is an undercurrent of anti-Irish, anti-Catholic feeling among some of the supporters of eviction. It is therefore all the more important to create opportunities for dialogue in a non-confrontational setting. All parishioners have this opportunity in their various local social/workplace groups.

Traveller community's contribution to the parish

Firstly the Travellers' devotion to the Faith has made a significant impact on the spiritual life of the parish. Some of the Dale Farm community have organised night prayer vigils in the church open to all, others attend the twice weekly day-long rota of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. This year 4 Traveller women became Eucharistic Ministers. For some time several Travellers have assisted with collecting Mass offerings. This year women from Dale Farm have volunteered to give the church a spring clean in preparation for Easter.

The Dale Farm Community has presented the parish with a new Monstrance. They have shown outstanding generosity in response to emergency appeals for victims of natural disasters and war such as the Tsunami and Lebanon. They contribute to the orphanage in Malawi and the East London Franciscan Brothers Project for the homeless via continuing food donations. In these and other ways the Traveller community has become part of the parish, they have become individuals like the rest of us, sharing difficulties, crises and joyful events.

I hope that the Travellers are able to continue as part of our parish family, I think we have all been challenged and enriched by the opportunity to join together on our spiritual journey.



Missing the Travellers A letter from Full Sutton Prison Moirá Baldwin

I wanted to use this opportunity to express my disappointment at losing contact with the Travellers.

Some of you will be aware that I have been involved with the Travellers' groups run at HMP Full Sutton and, along with Fr Ged Barry, have been instrumental in organising two Traveller Days held in the chapel here; which I know some of you were able to attend. There were also numerous contacts with the media, academia, the criminal justice system and outside agencies and organisations initiated during the period of my involvement with the Travellers' Groups. I had hoped to continue to develop those contacts with the aim of further raising the profile of the Travelling community.

My role within Full Sutton is that of a seconded Probation Officer, employed by the Humberside Probation Trust. Unfortunately since the last Traveller Day in 2007, I have been deployed into 100% statutory Probation work and have been unable to participate in the Travellers' Groups or Traveller issues. The prison's Travellers' Groups continue to be run at Full Sutton by Fr Ged Barry.

I have attempted to negotiate ongoing involvement, but financial constraints have prevented this. However, the Traveller Support Network has been very welcoming to me and continues to keep me involved by sending notes of meetings, information of forthcoming events and details of the National Gathering.

The knowledge I have gained as a result of my involvement with the Travellers has been and continues to be useful in my Probation work, and colleagues often still ask my views when conducting risk assessments and writing statutory reports on prisoners from a Travelling background.

So, I have expressed my disappointment and now also my hope that opportunities will arise in the future which will allow me to become involved in working with the Travellers once again.

Zefferino Giménez Malla (1861-1936),

Known as "El Pelé", was born of a Catholic gypsy family. He lived like a nomad for forty years and then settled in Barbastro (Spain). He married but had no children. Although he was illiterate, he taught the gypsy and non-gypsy children the first elements of Christianity, using the Bible above all, and he trained them to pray daily. He made peace among the Kalòs (Spanish nomads) and resolved their disputes with

others. He was honest in his work as an animal trader. In 1926 he became a member of the Franciscan Third Order. He belonged to Conference of St. Vincent De Paul. In 1931 he began participating in "Night Adoration".

During the religious persecution, he defended a priest who was being brought to jail. He too was arrested and then killed in Barbastro together with many priests, brothers and lay persons. He died shouting, "Long live Christ the King!", holding a rosary in his hands. His body was thrown into a common grave and never found again. In 1997 Pope John Paul II proclaimed him Blessed.

NOTICE....

Home is a Holy Place.

A resource pack for homes, schools and parishes with a DVD, featuring an Irish Traveller and Romany Gypsy family, is now available.

The pack can be ordered from the Marriage & Family Life Project Office:

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales,

39 Eccleston Square,
London SW1V 1BX.

Or visit the website at:
www.homeisaholyplace.org.uk

The Education and Skills Bill

Edited Briefing by the Traveller Law Reform Project (TLRP)

The Government in its Education and Skills Bill intends to raise the compulsory education leaving age to eighteen, and to see all adolescents engaged in academic education, training or vocational apprenticeships. This programme will be obligatory and non-compliance could lead to prosecution.

The Traveller Law Reform Project (TLRP) strongly affirms its support for improving, increasing and resourcing all manner of educational and training opportunities for 16-18 year-olds, but this can and should be done without compulsion and criminalisation.

TLRP therefore opposes the introduction of a legal duty on 16 and 17 year olds to participate in education or training, and in particular opposes the ultimate option of criminal sanctions against those young people who do not comply.

Apart from the point of principle that 16 year-olds are old enough to make their own decisions, this reform would impact disproportionately on Gypsy and Traveller adolescents and be at odds with the traditional socialisation practices of in-family learning, training and employment experiences.

One matter of particular importance to many young Traveller women will be the Bill's interference with their right to choose to be full time mothers. Many Traveller women marry at age 16 or 17 and become mothers in the first year or two of marriage, and they have the legal right to choose to do so. It would, however, appear that, while an 18 year old mother has the right to be a full-time parent, a 16 or 17 year old mother does not, which raises issues of age discrimination. The insistence that any young mother in this situation should leave her young children in the care of others while attending structured education or training sessions will seem perverse to many Travellers. The Government should acknowledge that

work in the home, particularly work as a mother, is every bit as valuable as work outside the home. Raising the next generation of citizens and workers is an honourable and very demanding occupation and should be recognised as such.

Improving the quality of education and training

TLRP strongly supports those aspects of the Bill which commit to an increase in well-resourced, flexible and young-person-centred education, training and employment opportunities for 16-18 year-olds

TLRP is concerned about how adequate, useful vocational training will be provided under the Bill for 16-18 year-olds. There needs to be a review of the effectiveness of the vocational opportunities offered to 14-19 year olds in recent years. Introducing compulsion without a significant improvement in quality and appropriateness of provision would, in our view, be harmful. We believe that Gypsy and Traveller students who have not benefited from current education provision will, with others, simply not participate and will be needlessly criminalised.

It may be sensible to provide all students, upon reaching the age of 16, with two years' worth of educational credits which they could use at any point in their life when they find the course or courses they want and are motivated to do. TLRP believes that this system would be a better way of motivating 16-18 year olds than compulsion.

The role of the Traveller Education Service

We believe that Traveller Education Services are essential to the provision of appropriate, good quality education to Gypsies and Travellers, and their continuing support is vital for any strategy in addressing the extreme educational disadvantage of Gypsies and Travellers. They represent an irreplaceable wealth of knowledge and experience. Traveller Education Services should be properly resourced to promote post-16 and vocational training.

At the same time, we believe that it is vital that all TES staff have a well-informed appreciation of the possibilities of Elective Home Education and are able to assist parents in the provision of good quality

education at home if that is the parents' choice and they are in a position to provide it.

Consultation and involving Travellers

It is striking how few members of the public know about the proposed raising of the compulsory education leaving age and how little public debate there has been. Many Gypsies and Travellers in particular were completely unaware of a proposal that would disproportionately impact on their lives. We wonder how much consultation has taken place with any children and young people. We recommend that the DCSF should be far more pro-active in seeking a wide range of views, most importantly, the users of educational services.

Appropriate education and training

The possibility of curricular reform is evident in a series of statements by Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Education, who has indicated that a quarter of the school day could be freed up in a curriculum that is less prescriptive and creates greater independence, personalised teaching and flexibility (Hansard, column 1321, 10 July 2007). These reforms are to be welcomed and could create a syllabus and learning experience that Gypsies and Travellers are more willing to subscribe to if new classes are imaginatively planned and well resourced. Such provision could also attract 16-18 year old Gypsies and Travellers into training courses.

A more vocational and discovery-oriented curriculum is a major desire of many Gypsy and Traveller parent for their children at the onset of adolescence.

National Gathering Catholic Support Network For Travellers 5-6 March 2008

A National Gathering of the Catholic Support Network for Travellers took place on 5-6 March 2008

at the Focolare Centre, Welwyn Garden City. Bishop Bernard Longley, the Episcopal Adviser to the Network was present throughout.

On the first evening, there was an informal sharing, and the following were some of the matters raised and explored in the discussion:

- Travellers in prison and their families,
- Issues around lawyers and how they treat and charge Travellers,
- Importance of the pledge for individuals and families,
- There is a need for catechetical resources for Travellers and a more systematic standard of catechesis,

Father Joe Browne closed the evening by informing the group about the forthcoming International World Congress in Germany in the first week of September.

Rosemary Keenan and Brenda Downes began the second day by leading a discussion of the 'Education of Traveller Children'. Rosemary highlighted a series of Ofsted Reports on the topic and the meeting discussed the topic in small groups. The discussion threw up a variety of suggestions of how to address the problem, including more relevant (eg vocational) curriculum and forms of alternative schooling.

Fr Noel Wynn and Antonia Moffat spoke about the annual pilgrimage of Travellers to the National Shrine at Walsingham for the feast of the Assumption (25 August). This year most of the Travellers stayed about 5 nights. There was a police presence, especially in the car park and the market; and the Police were very interested in the spiritual needs of Travellers. A pastoral team, brought together in July, planned the pastoral outreach. Prayer meetings were organised in the fields every evening. Everyone joined in; and as the week went on, the Travellers joined in more and more and even took a lead at times.

Dada and Gabriella, from the Roma Support Group, led a discussion of Roma from Eastern Europe. They showed a film and described the important differences between Irish Travellers, British Romany and Eastern European Roma. Some 80% of Roma, being from Poland are Catholic, though there is now a strong movement towards Pentecostal churches.

The gathering ended with a panel led discussion on 'Educating the Catholic Community'. The Church is trying to reach out to all ethnic groups. When black people came from the Caribbean and Africa, they came from various mainstream churches. Gradually black led churches formed. Some Irish Travellers now get the reaction that black people used to get from parishes. It is important that we are seen to be a welcoming church. There may be a need for a pastoral care handbook around ministry to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

NOTICE...

Future Date:

National Gathering of the Catholic Gypsy and Traveller Support Network

The Catholic Gypsy & Traveller Support Network will hold its next National Gathering at the Focolare Centre for Unity, Welwyn Garden City.

Tuesday 31 March (5:00) until Wednesday 1 April (4:00) 2009.

Sixth World Congress for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies

**1-4 September 2008,
Freising, Germany.**

The theme of this Congress will be 'Young Gypsies in Church and Society'.

It is sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People with the German Bishops' Conference.

Further information from
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