

PILGRIM CATHOLIC

Newsletter of the Gypsy & Traveller Support Network

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Court of Appeal Permits Eviction of Traveller Families from Dale Farm

The Court of Appeal has recently decided that Basildon Council can evict a number of Traveller families from the Dale Farm Site in Essex.

Travellers first settled at Oak Lane, Crays Hill in the 1960s when 40 families were given planning permission. Since that time, others have settled nearby at Dale Farm, without planning permission. The land in questions is part of the Green Belt.

In May 2005, Basildon Council decided to evict the families at Dale Farm who do not have planning permission. The High Court rejected the decision on the ground that the council was not offering an acceptable alternative location for the travellers. This was overturned by the recent Appeal Court decision. 86 families, including perhaps 150 children, now face forcible eviction from the site.

The Dale Farm case has been registered with the United Nations Advisory Group on Forced Evictions, and it is possible that the eviction will be observed by UN monitors.



Bishop Bernard Longley visiting Traveller Site in Hackney

*In November 2008, the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) released a public statement **The Provision of Traveller Sites**, which referred to this dispute. The CARJ statement is printed in full below. CARJ is responsible for organising the Catholic Support Network for Gypsies & Travellers and publishes Pilgrim Catholic.*

This issue of *Pilgrim Catholic* also contains a short article by Fr John Glynn, the priest whose parish includes Dale Farm and who offers pastoral support to the Travellers there.

As we go to press Fr John is waiting with his parish and the Travellers on Dale Farm. An eviction could come at any time without warning. Questions have been raised in the House of Lords and the media are descending. The Travellers and those supporting them are in low spirits and ask for prayers.

The Provision of Travellers' Sites

**A Statement by the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ)
25 November 2008**

Over many centuries, Britain has become a diverse community, made up of people with different languages, religious traditions, cultures and ways of life. This diversity is both a richness and a challenge. To meet this challenge, we must learn to live together with mutual respect and with each individual and each group granting to others their rights in justice and under the law. If we acknowledge the rights of one group and ignore the rights of another, we betray that deeply British belief in fairness for all.

The situation in Essex, recently highlighted by the press, and similar situations elsewhere, are not easy for anyone. They are especially difficult for those in authority who must at times balance the competing rights of different groups. They are also difficult for those in the media who must avoid polarising people and fostering divisions. Finally, they are difficult for all those involved in the dispute over conflicting rights, for in addition to asserting their own rights, they must understand the perspectives of others and work for the good of the whole community.

We have an obligation in justice to provide adequate sites for Gypsies and Travellers, just as we have an obligation in justice to provide sufficient affordable housing for the whole community. When new sites are needed, those in authority must find a way of providing these without trampling on the rights of local people already living in an area. At the same time, settled communities cannot refuse to accommodate the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

The need for suitable site provision for Travellers and Gypsies has been clearly identified through the Traveller and Gypsy Accommodation Needs Assessments which each Local Authority has carried out over the past two years in line with their legal requirements. It is in our view both a moral and a legal imperative of Local Authorities to meet this identified need. This site provision is absolutely necessary if Travellers and Gypsies are to achieve adequate levels of social inclusion.

It is important that the provision of these sites is carried out in a sustainable and managed way that will best serve both the settled community and the Traveller and Gypsy communities needs.

We are saddened and alarmed by the recent comments reported in the press. Such comments are bordering on racist and may even be considered as inciting racial hatred. This is something that must be deplored in the strongest of terms.

We all need to work together in addressing the problem of inadequate site provision and ensuring that sites are delivered. Only in this way will the problems of illegal encampments and developments be overcome.

We all have a responsibility to foster good relations between the different groups that make up our society and to create out of our diversity a cohesive community, characterised by mutual respect, understanding and cooperation for the common good of all.

Spiritual Refreshment For Dale Farm

Fr John Glynn, Essex

There are times when Dale Farm Travellers feel that no-one is listening to them, and the world is against them. But there was a moment recently when a ray of sunshine from hundreds of miles away lit up their lives.

When *The Tablet* published "Rest for weary Travellers" in its 21st June issue, describing the plight of the Dale Farm community, the article caught the eye of an elderly monk living in the heart of France. Brother John Patrick is a native of Norfolk whose great-grandmother was a Gypsy from Stock Common, only five miles from Dale Farm. He belongs to a new monastic community at Vezelay, one of the premier shrines of St Mary Magdalen. He wrote to me: "In practical terms I can't do much to help....But I can pray and I do....I could seek permission to give a retreat at Crays Hill."

On Saturday 8th November he arrived here to pay a brief visit to Dale Farm, and the following day conducted a day of recollection in Our Lady of Good Counsel church for over 30 Travellers and a dozen settled parishioners. He spoke at all the Sunday Masses, shared lunch with us in the parish hall, and led in a talk on our baptismal vocation, the praying of the Rosary, reflection on the gospel and concluded with Benediction. But it was the spontaneous way the Travellers recognised him as a man of God by queuing up to seek his blessing at the end. Their gratitude for his generosity of spirit really touched them.

It illustrated for me a truth I have come to appreciate. Show kindness and encouragement to a Traveller, and you will be repaid a hundredfold. Those who want to drive them away don't know what they're missing.

Good Samaritans in Manchester

Sr Carmel Clancy, Manchester

One evening in August, having fed Willie his horse some bread, Dougie thought he saw someone come out from the bushes and approach the horse. He waited a moment then walked back to see a young man sitting beside Willie, stroking him and eating some of his bread. Dougie went to speak with him and learned that this 18 year old young man was homeless and hungry. It transpired that he was called Paul, was from 'Sydney, had been in Manchester a short time and was about to be evicted from his flat. Dougie invited him to the Site and offered him a small trailer of his own. Meanwhile Sheila cooked a nice meal for him, prepared bedding and some equipment for his trailer and next day bought some clothes for him.

Paul's family had been searching for him. They were able to trace a call he had made to Sydney from a public phone box in Osborne Street, Collyhurst; and his aunt in London travelled to Manchester, bought a map at Piccadilly station and set out to find this place. As she was pacing about wondering what to do next a young man who, by sheer coincidence, knew that Paul was on the Site passed by and spoke to her. To her amazement she was within a short walk of Paul and went to find him.

Paul's parents are overjoyed that their youngest son who had lost contact with them is safe. He doesn't want to return home just yet, but they are happy now that they know he is safe, well and in good hands.

Paul goes to work with Dougie each day, and each evening there is a hot meal awaiting him. He is able to relax and watch TV, mix with the people on the Site, or enjoy his own company. Last weekend he went to Harrogate to see another aunt; he enjoyed it so much that he is planning to spend Christmas with her.

This is not the first time that Dougie and Sheila have taken people in and helped them until they got back on their feet. Good Samaritans like these restore one's faith in the human race and make one proud to be associated with them.

Gypsy/Traveller Community within the Diocese of Nottingham

Sr Patricia Feehan, Derby

There have been many good experiences for the travelling community within the Diocese and unfortunately some not so good. During March 2008 one of the young boys, Timmy Lee Casey, who lived on the site at Golf Course Lane, Leicester, had an unfortunate accident and died as a result. He had, a few months earlier, received the Eucharist for the first time with a group of boys and girls. May he rest in peace. His parents decided to bring his body back to Ireland to the family burial place. They were also anxious to have a remembrance, in his memory, on the



Bishop McMahon visiting a Travellers Site in Nottingham Diocese

site in Leicester; so shortly after their return, preparations began.

With the permission of the City Council, the Site Warden and other 'bodies', work started. A large statue of Our Lady was obtained and Timmy's father, with the help of the travellers, built a memorial. A plaque was bought and placed on the fenced site, with flowers adorning the area, and a seat on which to rest while praying. The Rosary is recited there regularly.

Bishop Malcolm McMahon, OP and Father J Maloney came on Thursday, March 3rd 2008 to bless the area and hold a short service. Following that Bishop Malcolm visited every family and blessed their homes. Refreshments were then served by the young girls and enjoyed by all. Two members of the City council joined us for the event.

A number of travellers, from the Diocese, joined us on the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes in July; and some of them acted as helpers of the sick. The young travellers, among them, made a deep impression on the pilgrims by their participation in the pilgrimage.

In November Bishop Malcom visited the site at Bulwell, Nottingham. Again a short service and a blessing of the site was held. Bishop Malcolm then visited the homes and families. The visit was appreciated by all those on the site. We are grateful to Ned and Mary, who 'opened up' their home to us, and

to all the women who worked so hard to prepare the food etc. This was very much appreciated as the morning was very cold and frosty but dry. We feel the visitation of the homes and sites is very important but, unfortunately, because of the need for Sacramental preparation, time doesn't always allow. We could do with more helpers!

We thank Bishop Malcolm and the priests for their great support over the years. We hope during the coming year to visit some of the other gypsy/traveller sites within the Diocese. We thank, too, the helpers who continue to assist the children and in some cases adults, with the Sacramental preparation. One of these is a traveller. We remember those who are away from their families and homes over a period of time.

Travellers on Pilgrimage to Walsingham 2008

Antonia Moffatt, Walsingham

The following are excerpts from a longer Report by Antonia Moffatt, coordinator of the pastoral team at Walsingham.

Overall the various Traveller visits during August 2008 to Walsingham have passed happily and without incident. The vast majority came here on Pilgrimage and spent their time prayerfully and respectful of the Shrine they came to visit.

As in previous years we began our Pastoral Outreach Team work with a prayer service of Penance and Intercession to entrust our work to the Mercy of God.

The main Groups for the Assumption began to arrive for the 12th/13th of August onwards. Like in previous years there were all sorts of rumours flying around about loads of Groups of Travellers on their way to Walsingham – many of whom never transpired! It is clear to me that not all Travellers on tour in North Norfolk or Suffolk have Walsingham as their intended destination! It has to be said from this and previous year's experience that these rumours end up being counterproductive and only serve to augment levels of stress in the village and among everyone involved. I for one next year am only going to pay lip service to them!

The field opposite the Slipper Chapel became the only field initially available to the Travellers because of the after effects of the torrential rain and hail storm a few days earlier which left the top field awash with mud! This meant that Travellers of all clans were parked far closer together than they would ever choose. I was impressed with the way they all handled this and saw it as a grace from Our Lady that 2 families who are in the middle of a serious feud of three years standing were able to spend a week together albeit at opposite ends of the field without incident. Perhaps hearts are softening!

Sadly there was trouble on the night of the 13th when a drunken adult Traveller attacked an elderly Traveller couple in a nasty way which meant that they left Walsingham without celebrating the Assumption Feast. The Travelling community themselves were furious that this should have happened and were very vocal with their disquiet about it both at the time and the next day. This cast quite a shadow over the Traveller Pilgrimage for the Travellers remaining.

The Pastoral Team was active from August 12th to 17th and it was very much appreciated by the local Community, local Businesses, Police, Traveller Liaison and Community workers alike. The feed back in the main which I have received has been positive and for the most part the local Community and Traveller Communities alike felt reassured by their presence.

On the Assumption Day there was a large influx of approximately 200 Travellers who visited just for the day. Most travelled in their cars and transit vans to make the journey. In all over the Assumption period there were approximately 50 Caravans parked down at the Slipper Chapel and none on the Coach Park.

The Travellers appreciated the Pastoral Team who visited each individual family. They also

organised prayer services every evening. A Catholic priest was available throughout the time to visit the vans and to hear Confessions if required. Many appreciated this ministry in particular as it tends to get overlooked where the Travelling Community are concerned. Individuals were also able to have time to talk re their problems should they need. I personally found that as I get to know the Travellers more year by year that they do really open up re the joys and sorrows of their lives. It is a privileged role to be a member of the Pastoral Team in this capacity...

The Travellers also appreciated the separate Mass, Divine Mercy and Healing Services which were organised with them. Due to inclement weather conditions we were unable to have the open air Mass which we had hoped for. The Traveller children appreciated the faith sharing and craft activities that some members of the team provided. I hope that this outreach can be built upon in future years. The Ormiston Traveller Outreach Team from Dereham also helped provide play activities for two sessions. It may be helpful to have more liaisons with this group during the forthcoming year. As usual Peter Daniel – the Traveller Liaison Officer of Norfolk County Council was a great source of support and encouragement.

I have since visited nearly all the Businesses in Walsingham since the Traveller Pilgrimage and in the main received positive feedback. The presence of the Police and Pastoral Team is the reason for this. This means that people are not as fearful, and that they are more readily engaging in relationship and dialogue with the Travellers and are enjoying the encounters in the main. People are realising that as with all Communities – there are good and bad and some who will challenge you to the limit! There were isolated incidences of shoplifting and abusive behaviour reported mainly involving teenage boys.

There are still some very natural fears when it comes to serving the Travellers – and it is fear rather than



Travellers at Walsingham, August 2008

hostility that I detect even from those who appear to be hostile! The food outlets and the pubs have the greatest challenge as they are the ones who often encounter groups in large numbers which their premises can barely cope with. Groups of teenage boys pose special concerns— but that is also the case daily up and down the country with groups from the settled community. Things need to be kept in perspective!

The Police presence did appear to dwindle as August progressed and many have reported that we could have done with more of a presence over the Bank Holiday weekend when the Youth 2000 Festival was at its height.

A further 20 Caravans or so arrived in total for the Youth 2000 Festival with 8 vans arriving half way through. This is difficult for the Festival Organisers as far as New Dawn and Youth 2000 are concerned as they expect people to register for their Conference at the beginning along with every one else —especially if they intend to camp or bring a caravan.

The Bank holiday period did prove problematic for some and many businesses wished that the Police had patrolled as vigilantly as they did for the Assumption period.

It has to be said that the period of the visits of Travellers extended this year from August 7th to August 26th —almost 3 weeks — and I was on duty for most of that time. The Police and Pastoral Team focused most of its energies from the 7th to the 17th.

I was active during the youth 2000 Festival along with Fr. Bill and one or two from our Pastoral Team. Youth 2000 set up an outreach from within the Festival which focused on the spiritual needs of the Travellers but which did not really focus on some of the wider issues which were causing concern on the fringes of the Festival and at the Shrine. This is an area which needs to be seriously looked at.

All in all I am pleased with the Travelling People's Pilgrimage time here in Walsingham and personally found it a privilege to work and pray along side them. It was especially encouraging to find a group of Travellers who were prepared to set up a Travellers Ministry Tent with a prayer focus. It was beautiful to experience them leading each other in devotional prayer and song.

Let us continue to pray for the Travelling peoples and this Pastoral Outreach Team and for all those involved in the Walsingham Traveller Pilgrimage organisation.

Sixth World Congress on the pastoral care of Gypsies

1 - 4 September 2008

Rosemary Keenan and Cecilia Taylor Camara

Rosemary Keenan and Cecilia Taylor-Camara attended the Sixth World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Gypsies in Freising, Germany (1-4 September 2008) on behalf of the Catholic Travellers Support Network UK. The following are their observations on returning from the Congress.

To overcome marginalisation, prejudice and discrimination of Travellers, Gypsies and Roma (referred to as Travellers for the purpose of our discussion), there must be greater involvement of this category of people in all policies and processes that affect their lives for any future development.

It is important that development of leadership among the Traveller communities and those who work with them is facilitated. These will include the church and various departments in the Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales.

The Archbishop of Munich and Freising H E Msgr Reinhard Marx intimated that bishops should make it a policy of asking parishes when they visit the following questions:

- Who are the minorities in your parish?
- How many are there in the parish community?
- What needs do they have?
- How do you meet these needs?

In terms of leadership we recommend that Bishops should ensure that minorities are part of the diocesan vision and plan. Strategic planning in the diocese and parish must include measures to combat the various levels of prejudice, discrimination, disadvantage and marginalisation of Travellers.

The Roma in Europe are quiet powerful and they have more involvement in policies and processes that influence and impact on their lives.

In the Seminary and on going formation for the Priests, Deacons and Laity race awareness training and development of anti discriminatory practice must form part of the syllabus.

The education and empowerment of Travellers to ensure their involvement at all levels of policy making is absolutely crucial.

In the UK holding an annual event in the diocese for example a Mass at Westminster Cathedral and encouraging priests to bring Travellers from their parishes would be truly representative of the diverse communities in which we live and work.



English speaking group at World Congress

NATIONAL GATHERING CATHOLIC GYPSY & TRAVELLER SUPPORT NETWORK

The Focolare Centre for Unity
Welwyn Garden City
31 March – 1 April 2009

The 2009 National Gathering of the Catholic Gypsy & Traveller Support Network will take place at the Focolare Centre for Unity in Welwyn Garden City from Tuesday 31 March (5:00) until Wednesday 1 April (4:00).

The National Gathering will bring together priests, religious and lay people who provide services to or are involved in a ministry to Gypsies and Travellers and others who are sympathetic to their concerns. It will provide an opportunity for informal sharing and for exploring issues of common interest.

To book a place (or for further information) please contact:
Travellers Support Network
Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ)
9 Henry Road
London N4

Maureen Corsi	020 8802 8080	maureen.carj@btconnect.com
Richard Zipfel	020 7226 5782	richard.zipfel@cbcew.org.uk

The cost is £60 for the full event or £25 for Wednesday only. Cheques should be made payable to CARJ. Those who are unable to reclaim the cost from their parish, diocese, agency or religious order may apply for a discount, and in some cases we may be able to help with travel expenses.

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