**Westminster Award for Human Life, Human Rights and Human Dignity**

**Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, Chief Executive, Mary’s Meals**

**Tuesday 7th February, 6.30pm, Committee Room 5, House of Commons**

**A conversation with an Italian priest launched Mary’s Meals in 2002, a remarkable project that today feeds over one million in schools across four continents – What Magnus Macfarlane-Barrow began in his garden shed has literally been the difference between life and death for millions of children. If it is true that the man who saves a single life saves the world, then Magnus must be on his way to saving a whole universe. What a worthy recipient he is of the Westminster Award for human life, human rights and human dignity – a Trinitarian nexus linking three attributes that assert the key essentials for a civilised and decent society: human life, human rights and human dignity.**

**Time Magazine named Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow as one of the 100 most influential people on the planet and he was described by his fellow Scott, Gordon Brown, as following in the footsteps of great Scottish missionary heroes such as David Livingstone and Eric Liddell of Chariots of Firefame.**

**While a fish farmer on Scotland’s West Coast, Magnus saw the television coverage of the Bosnian War: and, he says, “ I decided to fill my Land Rover with supplies and drive there to help.” But it wasn’t his first visit to Bosnia. In 1983 his deeply Catholic family had travelled to a Bosnian village called Medjugorje because of reports that some of its residents were seeing visions of the Virgin Mary. On one of his visits to the region he gave a lift to a young nurse named Julie, who wanted to volunteer. A few years later they married and the couple now have seven children.**

**Then, in 20022, during a visit to Malawi, he had a life changing conversation “I was staying with an Italian priest and he asked me if I wanted to go on his rounds with him. We went to this particular village because there was a mother dying of Aids, and she had six children. It was a desperate situation; she was saying that all she had left to hope for was that someone would care for her children after she had gone.”**

**Her eldest son, Edward, who was 14, was beside her and Magnus asked the boy what his dreams were. “He said, ‘To have enough food to eat and to go to school.’ For Magnus “Everything crystallised for me” and Mary’s Meals were born.**

**Three months later the first school meals were being set down in front of children who were used to having to do their lessons hungry. But he isn’t resting on his laurels.**

**There are, he says, another 57 million children across the world who are not in school because of hunger and poverty.**

**This is upholding life and dignity and providing an opportunity for these children. It is being pro life in every sense.**

**It is also about reaching out beyond our narrow concerns and preoccupations.**

**My late mother was Irish. She used to say**

**“It’s in the shelter of each other’s lives that the people live.**

**Perhaps in these increasingly xenophobic and fractured times that is a thought on which we should reflect.**

**Mandela – Umbuntu – A person is a person…**

**These ideas of mutuality are to be found in Confucius’ Golden Rule; in the Abrahamic faiths; and in humanist ideas that can trace their origins to Aristotle.**

**Aristotle – Politics – minded us that we are not solitary pieces: *Aidos.* In the Ethics of the Fathers, the great sage, Hillel, writes “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I?**

**So we are responsible for one another and to one another. This is the meaning of mutuality and it is the opposite of the impulse that encourages us to eschew social solidarity, to look the other way, to walk on the other side, to believe that we can be islands entire unto ourselves.**

**Just because you can’t solve the problems of the whole world…not a reason for not solving any of them.**

**So Magnus represents our duty to reach out to others but it’s also about generosity.**

**It was the poor man of Assisi who said use words but only when you’ve run out of *deeds.***

**And it’s not only the recipient who benefits from our generous deeds. Tocqueville said that an impressive practical wisdom is gained from simply playing our part. Through our engagements and our actions we put our own lives into perspective; gain a greater appreciation for what we have; gain wisdom and understanding and embark on the life-long journey of transformation.**

**We always need to gently remind ourselves that all the academic or professional achievements are very shallow if we are defeated in our personal selves. The more we use our talents, the more we use the privileges, freedoms, liberties, and opportunities , bought for us by others – sometimes with their blood and lives – the more fulfilled we will be .**

**Generosity, then, is not just about charity – or throwing a coin to a beggar.**

**Giving some of our treasure – where as an individual act or collectively – is not to be disparaged or under-estimated .**

**But we mustn’t salve our consciences believing that because we have given our 0.7% - that it’s enough. Often our time, talents and personal engagement will make a far greater and more significant difference.**

**There is a story of two pre Raphaelite painters: Rossetti and Morris.**

**Whenever Rossetti saw a beggar he would turn out his pockets….**

**Whenever Morris saw a beggar, he would give nothing.**

**Rossetti was all heart; Morris all head.**

**Our generosity should be based on both heart and head.**

**Magnus’ certainly is – and it is wonderful that tonight we celebrate his achievements and the work of Mary’s Meals with this Westminster Award,**