



Caritas Plymouth

Exercising the ministry of charity

Reflection by Deacon Nick Johnson

For a few months now, we have had access to *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis' latest encyclical. It is immediately notable by its Italian title (meaning '*brothers and sisters all*') rather than the traditional Latin. I hope you have had time to take a look at some of it at least. Even if it is hard for you, there are many presentations and summaries to help people access what he is saying.

Pope Francis speaks to all of us in a way that none of his forbears have done. This book considers the world's economies, the world's political systems, the ecology of the world, the religions of the world, our priorities and perhaps most importantly, the people who make up the world. He considers the situation and circumstances of those who seem to have everything and those who seem to have nothing.

In every chapter he challenges us to think about where we stand on these topics and how we might respond to what he says. A group of Christians from different faith communities have used the book as a Lenten book for their reflection and penitence this year. What emerges from reading it is that, once you know - and if you agree, you can no longer sit idly by and do nothing.

It is clear that we have to take into consideration all of the things that affect our world, our lives, the ecology of the planet and the compassion, mercy and justice exemplified in the life of Jesus towards humanity. As Christians this is not a 'pick and mix' process where one aspect of Catholic Social Teaching trumps another and gains higher priority, or

even excludes consideration of other matters at all. We cannot be pro-life and willing to let refugees begging for our help die in the sea. We cannot run food banks for our hungry and let children die from the effects of dirty water. We cannot have peace and maintain enough nuclear weapons to destroy the planet. We cannot claim to love our neighbour and tolerate the discriminatory treatment of any person. We cannot accept the suggestion that we are in a 'post truth' world.

If we fall for this, we quickly join that behaviour called 'moral relativism' by Pope Benedict, in which we validate our behaviour, compared to the behaviour of others, doing wrong on the grounds that 'everybody does it.' A moments' reflection might bring to mind our own contribution to this.

For Christians, our moral compass was set by a leader, God made man, who spent time walking on the earth we stand on and held to the morality of his Father. His behaviour was based on love, compassion, mercy and justice. All four of these traits are traits we should nurture in ourselves and be quick to recognise the times when we dispense with one or another of them because it does not suit our purpose on that day.

Our effort for dialogue, talking with each other to know each other better, to comprehend how it feels to be the other person, to listen first and hope to be heard second should be unremitting. We should resist fear at all costs. While we are talking to each other respectfully, we are less likely to overlook anyone and engage in violence against anyone. As Christians, our mission should perhaps be - Never leave anyone behind' and then we may fulfill His purpose for us.



NEWSLETTER

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'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Galatians 5:14

Last year we undertook a survey of our parishes to find out what is happening and got some amazing answers. Of those who responded:



97%

Support their local foodbank



83%

Support CAFOD or have a CAFOD group



85%

Offer social activities (Covid-permitting!)

Clearly there is some wonderful work going on across our parishes!

Elderly & Isolated: Reaching Out Digitally

In our 2019 parish survey 57% of parishes said they had online prayer groups. As the lockdown has continued, we are sure there are many more ways in which parishes are reaching out using technology. Eleven of our parishes also received funding from the National Lottery to provide equipment.

In January and March this year, Caritas hosted meetings to bring the parishes together to share ideas and challenges. Here are some examples of the great ways our parishes have been reaching out to their local community, to keep people connected and reduce isolation and loneliness.

- Regular **online streaming of content** (such as talks and tours of the church).
- Using **Facebook** to connect with the local community.
- **Live streaming important family and community events** such as weddings, funerals and baptisms.
- Using **Zoom for shared activities** and social events (for example virtual coffee mornings).
- Setting up a **parish blog** to help people in the local community feel engaged.
- Offering **training and development** to parish volunteers and the local community, for example safeguarding training and using digital technology safely online.
- Connecting with local schools by **sharing online materials** and also sharing school

videos with the parish community (such as music or themed assemblies).

- Including a **social element in addition to religious worship** such as coffee and chat after Mass or whole family catechesis.
- **Providing devices for people who are isolated** to reconnect and talk to family members. Plymouth parishes have been exploring this and can share the learning.



Funding for Food Parcels and Food Vouchers

Thanks to a very generous donation from the Albert Lubay Charitable Foundation, Caritas Plymouth has funding to give to parishes, schools and other organisations which are providing food vouchers or food parcels to families who are struggling to make ends meet.

The closing date for the next round is 30th April.

There is a very simple application process available [HERE](#)



Refugees, Migrants and Modern Slavery

“

I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

Matthew 25:35

”



On 8th February Caritas Clifton and Caritas Plymouth organised a joint event to celebrate the Feast of St Bakhita. The core themes of the event were on welcoming refugees and migrants and how we can tackle the scourge of modern slavery. The event was joined by Bishop Declan Lang and Bishop Mark O'Toole.

Bishop Mark invited people to reflect on the Parable of the Good Samaritan and to allow it to:

'Challenge each of us to make a decision about how we include or exclude those who are being trafficked or trapped in modern slavery... those lying in the ditch along the roadside'. In his final blessing, he asked the Lord to 'wake us from the slumber of indifference. Open our eyes to their suffering and free us from the insensitivity borne of worldly comfort or self-centredness.'

The starting point for us individually and as a human community is to cultivate *'a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.'*

It can be hard to know how to reach out to refugees and migrants and how to spot the signs of modern slavery. Resources can be found on the Diocesan website: www.plymouth-diocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Resource-Guide.pdf or by contacting caritas@prcdtr.org.uk



Supporting Refugees in Tavistock

Following the Welcome the Stranger event a small group of interested parishioners came together to discuss what more Caritas and parishes can do to take action on these topics and a number of ideas will now be taken forward. If you would like to be part of this group, please do get in touch with Caritas Plymouth.

It was great to hear a range of experiences and Gill

Mill has shared some reflections on her work with migrants and refugees in Tavistock parish. Gill is a trustee of the charity West Devon Safe Haven, a group formed with the aim of helping Syrian refugees transition to life in the UK. She kindly spoke to Caritas about her experiences helping refugee families...

How did you become involved?

Through the leadership of a few locals, a meeting was held in Tavistock Community College with the support of our local council and MP. The meeting was well attended and from that a group of us formed West Devon Safe Haven (WDSH).

Families were housed in Tavistock and Okehampton and WDSH quickly jumped into action. We were able to give each family the individual attention needed and once they realised we genuinely wished to help, START were happy to accept our help. They provided us with training, encouraged us to see how the compulsory language lessons worked and invited us to meet and share meals with refugees and asylum seekers.

With the culture shock of arriving in a strange country with a different climate, faith, language and missing loved ones (there had been a minimal cultural orientation prior to the families leaving Syria) we got to know the families and made life easier for them by:

- Helping with language lessons.
- Taking them to local places like the park or the beach.
- Providing bedding, winter clothing, school uniforms and home appliances.
- Ensuring they had access to doctors and dentists.

As well as liaising with one of the primary schools, I visited local churches to give talks and ask for help from volunteers; the response was amazing.



What activities are happening in your parish to support refugees and migrants?

My parish has been very supportive and there has also been amazing support from members of the SVP. Together we've helped source and deliver furniture, donate clothing, toys and bikes, and provide supermarket vouchers. Through links with the British Red Cross we make welcome boxes to give to asylum seekers and include little letters and drawings from the youngsters of the parish; we always involve the young people as it raises awareness of world poverty and Catholic social teaching.

What would you say to people who would like to do something to support refugees?

It is so rewarding, you make real friendships and it is putting our faith into action. I have found people really do want to help but often don't know how; if we lead they will follow.

It helps to have the backing of an organisation like START to provide support and direction. To really understand the plight of refugees and asylum seekers is important. If you're wanting to work within a parish, the SVP is also a good starting place.

It is important not to rush in and ask loads of questions, remember families have left their homes, their possessions and are trying to settle in an unfamiliar place not knowing if they can or will, ever return home. The key is to get out there and let people know what is happening.

Thank you Gill.

Care for Our Common Home

2021 is an important year for the environment, with the G7 Summit in Cornwall in June and the Climate Conference in Glasgow in November. We are also launching our Diocesan Environmental Policy. To find out more about how to take action visit the CAFOD website: <https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Reclaim-our-common-home>



Catholic Social Teaching stresses our Christian responsibility for the planet which begins with **appreciation of the goodness of all God's creation**:

'God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good' (Genesis 1:31). 'For you love all things that exist and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.' (Wisdom 11:24).



We can all do something to protect the environment - become a Laudato Si' Animator. Start 2021 by receiving in-depth online training and inspiring your community to care for creation. Sign up today at: <https://laudatosianimators.org/>

Caritas Plymouth is supporting a new Diocesan environment committee which will oversee the implementation of our new Environment Policy. We have great work already happening across the Diocese and would like to share two examples - please send us your examples if you have a project to share.

Rainwater Harvesting in Exmouth

In 2018 a rainwater collection tank was installed at **St Joseph's Primary School in Exmouth** as part of a £4 million flood reduction scheme. The tank stores rainwater which is then used to flush the toilets. It **halves the amount of tap water used** onsite and reduces the pressure on the sewerage network. This pioneering pilot project has the dual benefit of providing savings on the water bill, providing storm attenuation and **helping the local area become more resilient to climate change**. As part of the project, pupils at the school designed their own rainwater re-use features which are now installed outside their classrooms. These gather water from the roof, into the gutters and down to the classroom patios where one waters plants, another is shaped like a cloud which demonstrates the water as raindrops, and another collates the amount of water so children can use it as part of their science data.

Wild Green Spaces and Biodiversity

Since 2015, an unused and derelict space left

following the demolition of the parish hall at **Teignmouth** has been transformed by Fr Mark Skelton into a series of gardens **designed to recycle as much as possible, attract wildlife and grow food and herbs**. The land is not suitable for rebuilding due to subsidence and the soil was of poor quality.

The space was overgrown and full of stones, rocks and breeze blocks. This has gradually been cleared with **new garden spaces created**. As much as possible has been recycled and any wood cut down has been used to make a huge woodpile; **now a home for hedgehogs and nesting wrens and dunnocks**. The willows have been pollarded to create fences, the stones from the demolition have been used to make paths and raised beds, and stone flags from an old toilet have been used to create a seated area.

The new garden has been **created with biodiversity in mind** and includes a wild area, a pond which now attracts dragonflies, newts and frogs, bat boxes, a rose walk, an orchard which now has seven fruit trees, a wildflower meadow, a herb garden and a vegetable garden.

Justice and Peace: Social Justice Talks for Youth in our Diocese

This term Youth Events Worker for the Diocese of Plymouth Saskia Hogbin, offered young people aged 12-25 a chance to join a series of Social Justice talks, run jointly with the Columbans. The talks aimed to give young people an overview of a topic that hopes to **increase awareness and provoke thoughts and interest**. During each session, the young people consider how they can **put their faith into action** to do something about the cause, empowering them to do so if they wish.

One of the topics covered this half term was the **Environment**. There were two young speakers, a 17 year old activist, and a 22 year old working in a multinational organisation; **both were incredibly inspiring**. They talked about their call from God to be activists in their own way and were called to remind us all that it is our duty to love and look after the world we live in. Their vocations were brought alive as they talked about the experiences that had inspired them to become activists. One had lived in India and felt the call to keep precious spaces like the rainforest. The other talked about how joining protests made her feel empowered, marching with a group of others **sharing the same aspirations**.

The group considered what they could do and how they could deliver a message to remind us of **God's wish, asking us to respect the world we live in**. They explored the importance of prayer; **prayer gives us time to reflect on our thoughts**, to listen to God determining the action he calls us



to take. Campaigns can be both simple and small, such as informal conversations amongst friends about recycling or swapping the use of disposable products with reusable vessels. People talked about campaigns within schools or parishes and looking out for larger campaigns and protests that they could join in with.

The young people in this group may not be conscious of the level of influence they have on the people around them. Perhaps most will not become big activists like the speakers, but in their own way they will **influence their peers and others around them**. They will talk about things they heard or that caught their interest, they may even try to put some of the campaigns discussed into action. But whatever they choose to do they will now have an understanding of the topic and a chance to put their faith into action.

For more information about the talks please contact Youth Events at: youth@prcdtr.org.uk

NATIONAL JUSTICE AND PEACE CONFERENCE 2021

23-25 July 2021 Derbyshire

Are you interested in environmental issues? Do you want to be a young adult representative for the Diocese of Plymouth at the National Justice and Peace Conference? To find out more [CLICK HERE](#)



The Feast Day of Saint Oscar Romero, the Patron Saint of Caritas, took place on 24 March.

Saint Oscar Romero Pray for Us

O Lord Father of Mercy, who through Jesus Christ and the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace and the action of the Holy Spirit, has bestowed on Saint Oscar Romero the grace of

being an exemplary shepherd at the service of the Church, especially giving preference to the poor and need.

Grant, Lord, that I may also learn to live according to the gospel of your Son, glorify your Saint Oscar Romero and concede, through his intercession, the favour I ask of you... Amen

St Petrocs Update

This last year we have all had to adapt, in St Petrocs' case it has been to ensure their services can best support people who are pushed into homelessness and make every effort to get a roof over their head. They are experiencing a growing demand for their services and expect this to continue. **1,013 individuals have been supported** across the charity, including assisting 424 people into housing solutions since April 2020.

Their Winter Services are a key part of St Petrocs' work each year, normally taking the form of a night shelter. However this year they have had to adapt to provide appropriate emergency accommodation. This would not have happened without the **kind community supporting their work**, and they are so grateful. St Petrocs was kindly awarded funds from the Albert Gubay Charitable Foundation Trust via Caritas to help support clients with food throughout this period.

With your help St Petrocs have so far been able to provide over **900 nights of emergency accommodation including food** to people who



would otherwise be sleeping outside. Due to the increased demand this service has been extended and they continue to deliver it with plans to draw it to a close after Easter. People have been able to close the door at night and feel safe, and to have the use of a toilet, shower and provision of meals has been essential.

Finally St Petrocs wanted to share the wonderful recognition of the work of the charity as CEO, Steve Ellis, was recently awarded a Civic Award for '**Services to the Cornish Community**'. Steve accepted this award on behalf of the St Petrocs family and expresses his gratitude and thanks to Councilor Hilary Frank and Councilor Jacquie Gammon.

Catholic Children's Society Plymouth (CCSP) Update

CCSP are delighted to report that they have already received another £25,000 so far in 2021. In addition over £2,000 was raised from CCSP's first ever sponsored event where many local children gave up their bed for a night to help raise money for other children.

Patchwork Parenting facilitator Sarah Watts is offering online courses: '**Parenting Through the Primary Years**' at both 10am and 8pm every Wednesday and '**Hormones and Harmony Teenage**' on Thursdays at 8pm. She has also introduced a number of **Lockdown-Lowdown** sessions for parents to attend virtually; contact CCSP for more details.

Case Study: Sarah's Story

Sarah* bravely made the decision to turn her life around; as a victim of severe emotional and physical abuse, she was drinking heavily and her mental health was extremely low. She started

receiving mental health support and worked with supporting agencies to make decisions about the life she wanted to lead. She was reunited with her son who had been living with her grandmother.

Sarah and her son had been registered homeless, but with professional support, at the end of 2020 she was offered a two bedroom permanent property by the local council. With the help of her Support Worker Sarah received the help she needed to rebuild her life. Through the Essential Grants Programme she was able to purchase items such as a washing machine and cooker for her new home. She wrote: '*I just wanted to say thank you for the huge difference and help you have brought to my family, thank you.*'

*Names have been changed to protect the identity of individuals.

If you know of a family who might benefit from our help, please contact Karen Grute on 01364 645420, email: ccsplymouth@prcdtr.org.uk or visit: www.ccsplymouth.org.uk

Helping Stranded Sailors

Did you know there are an estimated 200,000 stranded seafarers currently stuck in dire situations around the world because of the pandemic? Some sailors have been trapped at sea for over 18 months. Stella Maris chaplains worldwide continue to support seafarers and help with repatriation. You can read more here: www.stellamaris.org.uk/stella-maris-highlights-plight-of-stranded-seafarers-bbc-radio-interview/

Upcoming Events and Dates for your Diary



EVENTS

‘A Politics Rooted in the People’ Conference

Thursday April 15th

Pope Francis’ new book *Let Us Dream* will be the basis for an international conference on April 15th from 4-8pm; the programme is available here: www.letusdreamconference.org

Reflecting on Catholic Social Teaching on the Environment

Saturday 10th July

This online event from 11-12.30pm will reflect on what Catholic social teaching tells us about the environment; email caritas@prcdtr.org.uk for more details.

National Justice and Peace Conference

Friday 23rd-25th July

Annual Conference of the Justice and Peace Network in Derbyshire. The theme of this year’s conference is Action for Life on Earth. You can find out more at: www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference

World Day of the Poor Caritas Event

Saturday 9th October

We hope to hold our event for World Day of the Poor at St Rita’s and have an opportunity for shared prayer, reflection and lunch! More details to follow.

IMPORTANT DATES

World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Sunday 25th April

A day to publicly fulfill the Lord’s instruction to, ‘Pray the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest.’ (Matthew 9:38)

World Communications Day

Sunday 16th May

A celebration of the communications media and how this can be used to share the gospel message.

Laudato Si’ Anniversary

24th May

The conclusion of the fifth anniversary year of Laudato Si’.

World Refugee Day

Sunday 20th June

An international day dedicated to raising awareness of the situation of refugees around the world.

Day for Life

Monday 21st June

A day raising awareness about the meaning and value of human life at every stage.