

# Together, we are Caritas

Saturday 7 November 2020

[dioceseofnottingham.uk/faithintoaction](https://dioceseofnottingham.uk/faithintoaction)



## Summary of discussions

A total of 84 people attended *Together, we are Caritas* on 7 November 2020. For more details of the programme, speakers, and resources which framed the discussion, visit [dioceseofnottingham.uk/faithintoaction](https://dioceseofnottingham.uk/faithintoaction).

For the afternoon, everyone chose one of the following themes to discuss in a breakout group:

1. **Growing in our lay vocation:** How can Caritas inspire and equip us as lay people for our common call in the world?
2. **Discerning what is mine to do:** How can Caritas help each of us to hear God's unique call, and act on it?
3. **Companions in mission:** What structures would enable us to support each other in our endeavours?
4. **Parish as mission community:** How can Caritas help our parish see itself as a sign of God's kingdom?
5. **Making a practical difference:** How can Caritas best equip our parish to make an impact in the world?
6. **Healing a wounded world:** How can Caritas help our churches be 'field hospitals' after Covid-19?

The following pages summarise all the ideas that were recorded in the afternoon breakout groups. [Click here](#) to see the raw feedback from which this summary is derived. Also included here are points made by more than one person in the Chat on the day and in the feedback forms afterwards. Some comments from groups are quoted in speech marks.

These are shared opinions which were voiced on the day, rather than official commitments or statements of fact. For each one there is an update in the right hand column about how it can be taken forward. Every effort will be made to act on them but please be patient if it takes a while!

They are grouped into four themes:

- **Putting down roots** in prayer, Catholic social teaching, and what's already going on
- **Including everyone**, particularly underrepresented groups
- **Making connections** within parishes, with civil society, across the diocese and beyond
- **Sharing knowledge** so that everyone can find what they need
- **Bearing fruit** in practical action.

## PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

Everything Caritas does should be nourished with **prayer and spirituality**: the 'journey of prayer is part of Caritas'.

**Catholic social teaching** is an essential foundation for what we do. There should be an online resource and discussion forum, and online groups to explore, for instance, *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*.

Caritas should start by **mapping** what each parish already does.

## INCLUDING EVERYONE

Several people commented that the attendance did not reflect the **ethnic diversity** of our parishes. It was considered a priority for Caritas to reach out to the diaspora communities in our parishes. International Masses, best seen as an ongoing commitment, are a good way of promoting integration.

Many were conscious of the average age of those attending. Efforts are needed to involve **younger people**, including through **schools, the Diocesan Youth Service and university chaplaincies**. It's important to give young people a voice in Caritas and listen to their ideas. DOCAT, the youth version of Compendium of Social Doctrine, is a useful resource. Young people could particularly share their IT skills with older parishioners, and so help to break down isolation, build intergenerational contact, and bridge the digital divide.

- A Zoom workshop is planned for January to develop an underpinning for Caritas in prayer and reflection – see [Grapevine 14](#).
- An offer to help in keep [catholicsocialteaching.org.uk](http://catholicsocialteaching.org.uk) up to date has been referred to CSAN
- A webpage of CST resources will be created
- A formation programme will be co-ordinated with the Adult Formation team
- A diocesan survey was undertaken in 2019. Nationally, Caritas Social Action Network are currently undertaking a survey. More on mapping below...
- We'll be in touch with some of the diocese's most diverse parishes to ask diaspora groups how Caritas can support them
- We're starting to talk to the Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts which run Catholic schools about how schools and parishes can support each other's outreach under the Caritas umbrella
- Similar conversations will take place with the Youth Service and university chaplaincies.
- Longer-term, a more strategic approach is needed to develop 'young Caritas'

A strategic approach should be taken to engaging schools. Each Catholic Multi-Academy Trust should be involved in order to 'galvanise' education sector and foster closer links with schools. Parishes and schools can support each other in charitable activities which are good for PR. It was hoped that more teachers would be involved in future meetings.

There is also a need to include people with **sensory impairments** and **learning disabilities**. Where necessary the diverse needs should be named so that an appropriate response can be made to each.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

As well as reaching out to underrepresented groups, Caritas has must introduce people to each other, because when it comes to missionary outreach we are 'stronger together'. Caritas can link people together so 'they are not alone in answering their calling'.

Rather than too much formality, the aim should be to 'create friendships around what God is calling us to do', with 'smaller **support systems** which relate to us and help us'. There was a need for small '**listening groups**...to support one another', offering mutual 'shadowing and accompaniment for the journey'. For all the interest in fostering action, it was also important to help busy, generous souls to 'find balance, **maintain wellbeing**', hold boundaries and avoid getting overwhelmed and overcommitted.

'**Communities of practice** and **special interest groups**' will break down the isolation some feel, even in their own parish, and enable projects to get off the ground. An **online forum** or message board could 'allow Caritas volunteers to ask questions, share suggestions or ideas, or indeed, personal and parish experiences of "being Caritas" locally'.

- Further advice is welcomed about how this could be done in practice. Meanwhile we'll follow up previous conversations with SPANNED, which works with people with additional needs in the diocese.
- We are developing a diocesan mapping platform which should be ready soon.
- We are exploring with Dr Amy Daughton, who spoke at the event on 7 November, what such mutual support might look like. We'll share some ideas at a Zoom meeting in early 2021, and then perhaps we can pilot something.
- It has been suggested that Caritas should operate a 'companions' scheme through which people can contact each other direct and support each other
- We are testing the idea of setting up Facebook Groups on various ongoing topics, but will need to choose their focus wisely. We'll seek the new diocesan Communications Director's advice.

Those present wanted more **opportunities to meet by Zoom**. While mindful of those who need help with IT, Zoom was considered a vital tool to promote participation and minimise Caritas's carbon footprint. After the pandemic, **'blended' gatherings** will be needed which allow people to choose whether to meet in person or join in remotely.

As well as connecting Catholics to each other and 'now with the Catholic world through Caritas', it should connect Catholics to **partner organisations** in their localities. Caritas can help individuals, parishes and groups network locally, and discern how best to collaborate. Chief among the local partners are other churches and faith communities. **Ecumenical collaboration** was strongly endorsed, but it requires a 'new mindset' because historically Catholics tended to be reluctant to join ecumenical initiatives.

## SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The first prerequisite for connecting with each other in Caritas, at both parish or diocesan level, is for us all to 'know who our people are'. Lockdown revealed that parishioners seldom have access to the **contact data** necessary for organising pastoral care and outreach. In some parishes the list is out of date, or not accessible. When people were originally added they were not always asked for permission to share their data in the way the pandemic required. Many people reported a need to refresh their **parish census**, with questions and consents that learn lessons from the lockdown and help outreach to happen.

There is a wealth of skills for outreach among the people of the diocese. We need a mechanism to offer what we can, and ask for help from others, both within and between parishes. A **skills audit** is one way to do this – although the term may be offputting, and there would need to be plans already in place to use the offers received. Caritas should also enhance the skills we have, through **training and capacity building**, for instance in advocacy, campaigning and public speaking.

- We've got the necessary equipment for Zoom and blended meetings
- Many of the things recorded will be taken forward through Zoom workshops in early 2021
- Initial work has been done to design a mapping tool, so that parish representatives can record their local scene on a diocesan database and shared with neighbouring parishes.
- Caritas will have an important role of brokering partnerships between local Catholic initiatives and civil society
- There are plans for a post-pandemic, 'mission oriented' template for a parish census
- A skills audit is an option to include in the parish census template
- Caritas should develop a programme for practical training, as well as formation in Catholic social teaching, but we need to find out the needs people have

A skills register is just one example of the knowledge Caritas will need to keep and share. Caritas should be 'a central repository of what is happening in the diocese', a 'guide to finding local demographics', a 'funding directory' and list local contacts for support to disadvantaged groups. The scale of the task would require people to take responsibility for **mapping** not just activity in their parish, but in their wider locality, while Caritas provides the platform on which information is managed.

Outreach happens through a process of '**joining up the contribution of individuals** into a parish contribution'. Then people can 'work together as a group', particularly in parishes which have Mass congregations which tend not to mix. In order that 'parishes can use Caritas for their social outreach', Caritas will need a recognised identity in each parish.

Much more can be achieved by **connecting parishes with each other**, enabling them to 'learn from and encourage each other, exchange best practice' and share success stories.

**Clergy** need to be involved in the Caritas journey, and in future events. Public organised activities need official approval, including from the parish priest. However groups should be able to take initiatives themselves, with social action able to continue to develop when a priest is replaced.

Caritas is not just a parish, inter-parish or diocesan network. It 'brings a **global perspective**', for instance on the climate emergency. It should promote policy change, such as divestment from fossil fuels.

- The mapping platform which is currently being developed will hold most of this information. Links can be provided to demographic and funding information on other websites.
- A visual identity and ideas for organising a visible parish Caritas will be prepared for the launch next year.
- A useful structure has emerged within Caritas of four county-based teams. These teams will be well-placed to organise local groupings.
- Engaging clergy will be explored with their Director of Ongoing Formation.
- A diocesan environmental policy and strategy is currently being developed. Caritas will have an important role in providing ideas and resources for parishes.
- We have made a funding application to enable us to establish a scheme of 'global advocates' with CAFOD.

Imagining the parish as a '**field hospital**' triggered many ideas. Parishes could host drop-ins and 'come and chat', 'listening and friendship groups and centres'. These could help people with mental health issues, or with access to online services (such as form-filling). There may be potential for 'telephone support for counselling and bereavement support'. It's important to 'start small', and avoid an 'us and them' attitude which distinguishes the helpers from the helped. It is also vital that the 'organisation of love' reaches and fulfils all the necessary safeguarding, data protection, accessibility and other standards.

It is too early to tell what long-term impact the pandemic will have on the Church. However Caritas can help with **parish recovery**. We need to 'build on what we've learnt during Covid-19'. The planned *Here: Now: Us* workshops offer a practical approach, and we 'need a template for a parish post-Covid plan' – and 'a celebration when Covid is all over'. At the same time the diocese is undergoing a process of parish restructuring. More information was requested on these proposals, with a request that they be made available on the internet.

- Two meetings have already taken place to identify the resources parishes need for such schemes, and more are planned. External funding will probably be needed.
- These meetings also mapped the regulatory and safeguarding standards involved in parish initiatives. Caritas will develop guidance in close liaison with diocesan staff who oversee standards.
- We will explore what can be done to gather experiences and learn lessons from the pandemic
- We have received a grant to fund five *Here: Now: Us* mission planning workshops in parishes. Publicity will be sent out soon, and we hope that every parish that would like one can get one...eventually!

If any of this triggers further ideas, if you know someone who can help,  
or if you'd like to find out more, contact Paul Bodenham at  
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