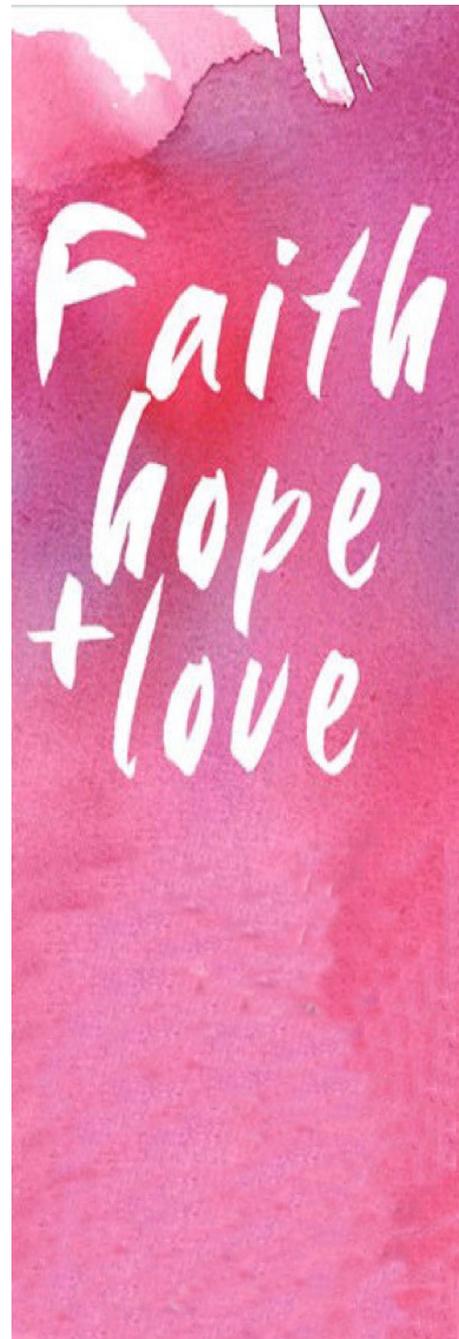


In his message at the beginning of Holy Week, Bishop Mark said *‘We have all been thrown inward. Into our own homes and households. Into our very selves. Yet, these past ... weeks have already born some new and unusual fruits, in us, as Catholics’*. He reminded us that *‘although this time, so often feels like a long Good Friday, in God’s good purposes, it already contains the hope of brighter and better days to come. And who knows what gifts God will have bestowed upon us, in the meantime?’*

We hope that this newsletter highlights some of the wonderful ways in which people are sharing their gifts with others across the Diocese.

Welcome to the fourth Caritas Plymouth quarterly newsletter



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MESSAGE FROM CANON JOHN DEENY, VICAR GENERAL

The Urbi et Orbi Blessing to the City and to the world, given by Pope Francis in an empty St Peter's Square, was especially poignant this year during a time of pandemic. Pope Francis drew on the story of Jesus in the boat with his disciples, during the tempest (Mark 4: 35-41).

'Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us. Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying "We are perishing" (v. 38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.'

He goes on to say how the storm exposes our vulnerabilities and uncertainties. It would be true to say that it also exposes the flaws in our communities, our families, ourselves.

Yet, at the same time, facing this crisis has caused us to consider again what is truly important and of value in life:

The sense of solidarity amongst us all;

Our faith, family and friends;

Caring for the weak and the vulnerable;

People who do key work for us: health workers, supermarket workers, cleaners, refuse collectors, teachers, and many more.

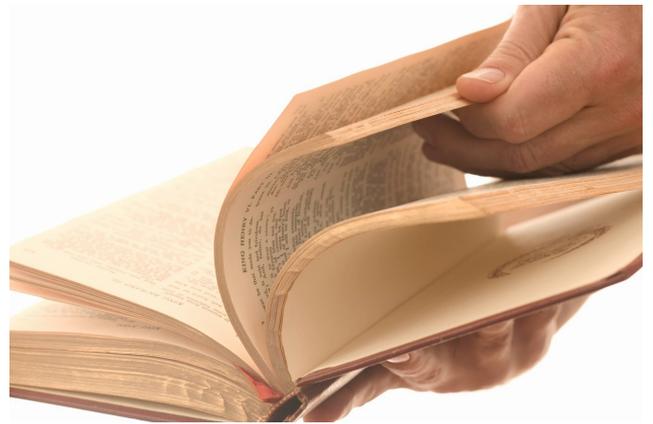
Our beautiful and fragile planet, which is taking a much-needed breath of fresh air.

Pope Francis invites us, at this time, to have faith in Jesus who calls us to renew our Easter faith, He is risen and living by our side.

It is important to know Jesus is with us now, to trust in him, and listen to his voice. And when the storm eventually does calm that we do not turn away from him, but keep our eyes fixed on him. In this way we remember that we are all in the same boat, all of us called to row together, and remember the lessons learned during the time of crisis.

Pope Francis finished his words with this prayer and blessing. May we make it our own:

Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: "Do not be afraid" (*Mt 28:5*). And we, together with Peter, "cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us" (*cf. 1 Pet 5:7*).



COVID-19—HOW WE ARE RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS

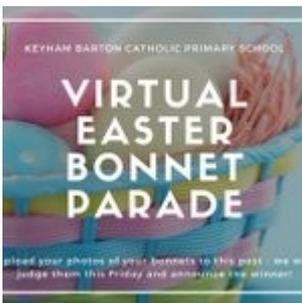
It has been truly humbling to see the amazing work in our parishes, schools and communities in response to the challenges that COVID-19 has created. Caritas Plymouth is grateful to those who have shared their stories and would love to hear more. Here are just a few examples of caritas in action:

- ◇ Parish Priests are calling and checking in on their parishioners to offer spiritual and practical support.
- ◇ Bishop Mark and many priests have moved rapidly into the digital arena offering daily prayers and mass across the Diocese including livestreaming through the [Cathedral website](#). As Bishop Mark said in his message at the beginning of Holy Week ‘In a very good way, modern media has made us all more conscious of that fully Catholic Communion present across the entire world, and even of that unseen Communion of the Saints, who gather with us at every Mass.’
- ◇ Catholic Charities are taking action to offer befriending, shopping and other services to help those who are restricted to home or who are struggling to cope with sudden changes. You can read more about this in the updates from partner organisations.
- ◇ Our parishioners are taking action in their local communities. Many are key workers undertaking the vital roles that keep others safe and well, others are volunteering in their local communities to operate helplines, deliver medicines or offer befriending services.

Caritas Plymouth has developed a [short guide for parishes](#) to support social action and offer some top tips for keeping volunteers and communities safe. Any parishes wanting any further advice or support are invited to contact caritas@prcdtr.org.uk.

AND IN OUR SCHOOLS

There have been some great examples of action being taken by our schools and we have only space to share a few examples but will look for ways to share more.



In one primary school, the children wrote letters to people who are vulnerable and isolated at home and those letters were delivered by the SVP volunteers. The people who received the letters are planning to write back.



Other schools set up virtual Easter Bonnet Parades; designed beautiful rainbows for their school banners and gates to encourage people to stay safe and stay positive; others organised food collections for the most vulnerable.



UPDATES FROM SOME OF OUR PARTNERS

SVP

SVP work closely with our priests and parishes to support our parishioners in any way required, be it food, fuel, sometimes money, lifts to hospital, church or just making regular visits to people in their homes to alleviate loneliness. They help anyone irrespective of race or religion. Below are some of the activities currently being undertaken.

- * A 'living with loss' group send food and clothes to St. Petrocs and Plymouth refugees
- * Many groups provide visits to the vulnerable and elderly and can phone when visits are not possible
- * A group attend a Hospice, a dementia group, visit residential homes and local hospitals
- * Food collected at Mass is taken to the local Foodbank and to refugee centres
- * Attending Dartmoor Prison as Assistant Chaplains
- * Providing Lifts to hospitals and visits (when not restricted)
- * Funding communal lunches for disadvantaged youths and help for families

If you have no SVP in your parish why not speak to your parish priest about starting one? You can also phone Geoff Provis 01566 775820 or Simon Coombs 01884 258331 or contact the [SVP national team](#) for more advice.

The vast majority of members find it a very rewarding experience.

ST PETROCS



Across the Diocese, agencies have been working tirelessly to reach out and offer support to homeless people. St. Petrocs in Cornwall are currently supporting 120 people in supported accommodation and recently helped to rehouse 29 people within a 48 hour period after the local Council took over a holiday park, empty due to the Corona Virus. St. Petrocs has launched an [emergency appeal for help](#).

Living on the streets makes it impossible to 'stay home and self-isolate', please remember the homeless in your prayers.

Catholic Children's Society (Plymouth)

The Society has continued to receive grant applications, during these unusual and very difficult times for families. However they are taking a little longer to process the applications. In the last few weeks they have provided, beds, mattresses, cookers, and school uniforms.

If you know of someone needing support, they can apply via email to CCS(P) to Karen.Grute@prcdtr.org.uk

You can find out more about how to support this great work [here](#).



STELLA MARIS

During the Corona Virus outbreak please spare a thought for seafarers from around the world working their hardest to bring 95% of all our goods to these shores. They are the invisible workers keeping all countries moving at this very challenging time. Without them the economy would grind to a halt.

Unfortunately, due to Port Health rules, Chaplains are not counted as essential personnel and therefore Stella Maris have no access to the ports or the seafarers. The seafarer rooms are also closed so they have no access to a quiet space off the vessel. Whilst we must abide by the rules we do have great concerns for the welfare of all seafarers. Ordinarily they work a nine month contract but due to the shutdown of airports they will be unable to return to their countries and loved ones. Their contracts will be extended so they may be facing more than twelve months at sea. This is going to be an extremely stressful time for them as they will also be worried about the health of their families. Many seafarers come from developing countries and health care can be expensive and in short supply.

All Stella Maris Chaplains work closely with Port employees. Through our contacts we are able to keep in touch with seafarers by email and text. Although this is not ideal, at least the seafarer knows that we are still contactable and supporting them. If they should have concerns about their contract or salary during these challenging times we can liaise on their behalf with the International Transport



Federation. Likewise, if they have anxieties about their loved ones we can assist as Stella Maris is an International organisation with contacts around the world. The picture shows Ann and Nuan who are Stella Maris ship visitors in the South West

Please keep all seafarers and their families in your prayers. You can find out more about how to support Stella Maris [here](#)

CARITAS PLYMOUTH—WHAT DO WE DO?

Caritas Plymouth aims to provide fresh impetus to put the command of the Lord into practise: ‘Love one another as I have loved you’, (John 13:34-35). It works with partner organisations already existing to put the Church’s [Social Teaching](#) into action and provide a network to share good practice in the service of the most poor and vulnerable. It also aims to encourage new initiatives to put the Gospel imperative of love and mercy into action. Please do get in touch to share your good practice or to seek new ideas caritas@pcdtr.org.uk

MODERN SLAVERY

On Saturday 7 March Caritas Plymouth held its fourth information event looking at Modern Slavery and trafficking.

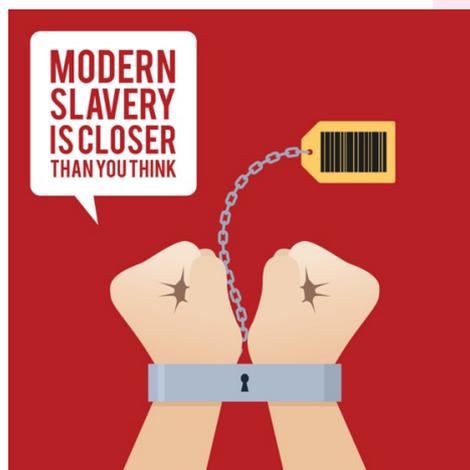
Human trafficking and modern slavery are, in the words of Pope Francis, ‘grievous wounds in the flesh of humanity...in the flesh of Christ himself’. The Modern Slavery Event organised by Caritas Plymouth aimed to open people’s eyes to the extent of slavery in the UK and overseas, to share the work that the Catholic Church is doing and to inspire further action.

Today there are estimated **over 40 million people in modern slavery around the world** - around 136,000 in the UK. Modern Slavery takes many forms including forced labour, debt bondage, human trafficking, forced and early marriage.

The Right Reverend Mark O’Toole, Bishop of Plymouth, introduced the day saying ‘Constant cost cutting creates an environment where slavery-tainted goods are hidden in layers of subcontracting and outsourced production. It is something perhaps we need to be more sensitive to when looking for that key bargain when shopping’

Bishop Mark challenged everyone to ‘break through the veil of indifference. We are all invited to become more aware of the extent of the problem and the suffering it causes’. He placed the day under the protection and intercession of St Josephine Bakita who was sold into slavery as a child and encouraged us to renew ‘our efforts to free our brothers and sisters still caught in the scourge of modern slavery’.

The [Medaille Trust](#) talked about their work in the UK with victims of modern slavery to help them recover and rebuild their lives. They are the largest provider of supported safe house beds in the UK. Stella Maris (Apostleship of the Sea) reminded us that around a third of all seafarers are Catholic. The organisation works to reach the most vulnerable through a network of over 1000 port chaplains. Their [Life at Sea](#) report sets out the great work they do to support vulnerable people often hidden from sight.



MODERN SLAVERY

HOW WE CAN TAKE ACTION

Participants at the event discussed what more we can do to help. We can

Pray for those affected by modern slavery;

Support Caritas and its partner charities through campaigning and fundraising;

Open our Eyes for the signs that someone may be a victim of modern slavery and report our concerns (the [CAB](#) has some great advice on how to approach this;

Ethical Purchasing: buy fairly traded goods or purchase from companies which have a modern slavery policy in place.

Encourage organisations which help:

[Medaille Trust](#)

[Stella Maris](#)

Every action can make a difference!



DEBORAH FISHER OBE, PLYMOUTH CARITAS MANAGER

Pope Francis has taken the lead in putting the Gospel Imperative of love and mercy into action and Bishop Mark O'Toole sees the establishment of Caritas Plymouth 'as the most fitting response to the call to mercy'. I am delighted to be working with the Diocese of Plymouth to take forward this wonderful work. I have a very varied background and hope that my skills and experience will add value to the mission of Caritas Plymouth.

I worked as a civil servant in the Diplomatic Service for 23 years and saw catholic social action in practice among the poorest in Tanzania and Ethiopia. I visited CAFOD projects and saw the work of Catholic Parishes and Priests living among the poorest, offering spiritual leadership, practical help and education. My family were welcomed in parishes across the world and my children enjoyed First Holy Communion classes in Paris, Ethiopia and Devon.

Since leaving the Diplomatic Service, I have lived in Devon and have volunteered and worked in a number of organisations including as a Trustee of the Diocese of Plymouth and Governor of a Catholic primary school. For the last 6 years I led a team of staff and volunteers as a Director in the British Red Cross, delivering emergency response and health and social care services to vulnerable people across the South West.

I hope that this breadth of experience and passion for volunteering and our faith, will help me to support our parishes, schools, charities, groups and individuals to build on the great work already happening in the service of the most poor and vulnerable. I will try very hard to live up to the aspirations of Bishop Mark : '*May Caritas Plymouth give us all new opportunities to proclaim our faith, in deeds as well as words*'.

I look forward to meeting many of you online and then in person when possible. Please don't hesitate to get in touch via email: Deborah.fisher@predtr.org.uk and please follow us on twitter @CaritasPlymouth.

Community Sponsorship

The national Community Sponsorship Scheme is currently on hold due to the Corona Virus. The hard work of Companions Sidmouth goes on, keeping everything on track to welcome a family into the area later this year. It can take a year to get from start to finish in this sponsorship process and we are finalising a step by step guide for groups. If your school or parish is interested in resettling a refugee family work can still go on. Please contact caritas@predtr.org.uk if you would like a copy of the guide.

Justice and Peace: *The Lord does not abandon those who seek him and call upon his name: "He does not forget the cry of the poor" (Ps 9:12)*

Justice and Peace is an important element of our work. We plan to focus later this year on how we can raise awareness of World Day of the Poor on 15 November 2020. The national Justice and Peace network have great resources and their Spring Newsletter has a focus on fighting poverty – even more relevant now <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/cms/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2020-Newsletter-1.pdf>.

We will also be looking at how we can engage people in prayer and action around ecological issues, the climate crisis and more sustainable living. If you would like to be more involved please email Deborah - caritas@predtr.org.uk

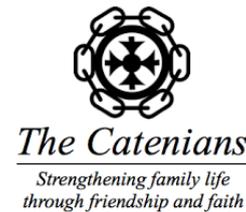


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