

LOVE.

SAY IT WITH YOUR LIFE 

 SHARING FAITH IN THE
DIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER



LOVE. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Love: Say it with your Life

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Imprimatur: Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster

Published by The Agency for Evangelisation, Diocese of Westminster.
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The structure of the meetings has been taken from *At Your Word, Lord*. The content of this faith sharing booklet draws on the themes of *Love in Action*.
www.stepforwardinlove.org

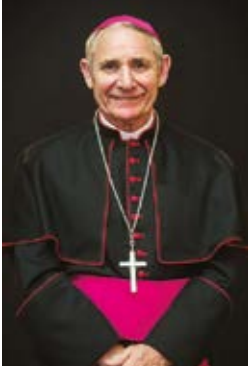
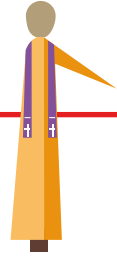
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The publishers wish to thank Jacob Quagliozi from Housing Justice and Roisin Sullens for supporting the development of this resource.

Designed by Massimo Gangemi.
www.mgangemidesign.com

Printed by DX Imaging.
www.dx-imaging.co.uk

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FORWARD

'Love in Action', these three simple words convey and express what the Church is called to be. This has always been the case. Pope Francis, since the beginning of his Papacy, has urged us to rediscover our essential mission to the world. That is, to look around us and see the need, and then to put our faith, and our love, into action.

The Agency for Evangelisation and Caritas together have compiled this season's Faith Sharing booklet to help us do that. The material used in *Love: Say it with your Life* flows from Catholic social teaching. This teaching explains that there are some principles which are indispensable and must be observed and insisted upon by Christ's followers, guided by the Holy Spirit. Catholic social teaching has its roots in the proclamations of Old Testament prophets. They announced God's love for the poor and called on God's people to live lives which showed concern for the poor and passion for justice.

Since the Industrial Revolution, several popes have formulated and shaped Catholic social teaching in written documents. They looked at changing society and declared that, amidst these changes, each human being has a dignity which must always be protected and never undermined; everyone has a right to participate in and contribute to building society; creation too should be seen as a gift from God.

These teachings developed from what God has revealed to us about himself. God's inner nature is a constant exchange of love, and God reaches out to draw humankind into this communal love. This in turn reaches deep into our society. He came to our rescue through his own son Jesus, inviting us to share in his life. Caught up in his love, our desire is to be like him in how we relate to the world and to those around us.

It is hoped that the contents of this booklet, whether absorbed quietly in reflection, or better, discussed in groups with fellow parishioners, will inspire us to actively bring God's love and justice to all the places where we live out our daily lives.

Paul Mc Aleenan

Bishop Paul McAleenan
Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster

The phrase 'Love and say it with your life' was first used by St Augustine and beautifully encapsulates a deep truth at the heart of our faith. The living of our Christian faith is based on love. Every vocation starts from love.

Pope Francis has frequently issued an invitation to see beyond our church buildings and to 'step forward in love'.



The Pope has instituted a new 'World Day of the Poor'. He asks all of us, whatever our means or background, to unite in love, in acts of service to one another and in genuine encounter.

This booklet is an opportunity to prepare for that encounter. The six sessions will invite you to examine some of the themes of Catholic social teaching and explore how your faith in a God of love calls you to respond.

The materials will also help you to journey towards the World Day of the Poor, which in 2017 falls on 19 November. The readings in the sessions refer to the readings of the six Sundays beginning with 8 October. You can either meet in the week leading up to the Sunday, or in the week after. The sessions can also be used at other times, as the readings and themes are always relevant.

SIX SESSIONS

The sessions focus on:



DIGNITY



COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPATION



OPTION FOR THE POOR



DIGNITY OF WORKERS



SOLIDARITY AND PEACE



CARE OF CREATION

For some of you, these practical points will be well known, but for others, they will be new. To new members of the small community, we offer a big welcome, and to returning members, welcome back. Take time to read these few pages - they will be of great benefit.

GATHERING as a small community to share prayer, life and faith is an important part of parish life. This is a sacred time. It is important that you take the time to get to know one another, so always make room for the introductions of anyone new, and to ask one another how you are and what has happened since you last met.

HOSPITALITY and environment are very important. You should meet in a reflective atmosphere with as few distractions as possible. It would be helpful to have a central focus, such as an open Bible and a candle.

TIMING is important. The suggested time for each session is 90 minutes (see page 7 for the structure of the meeting). Each session will have a balance of prayer, sharing experience, exploring scripture, reflection and talking about how we are living our faith.

PRAYER will take different forms; we will make a suggestion for a Psalm or another opening prayer. You can make other suggestions, too, as it is helpful to try varied ways of praying, such as playing some religious music. Ordinarily, it is good to have about 15 minutes of prayer. Silence is an important part of the process, so don't be afraid to pause during your prayer time or, indeed, during the reflection time for some quiet.

EXPERIENCE is essential to our spiritual life. During the session we need to reflect on our real experience. Then we listen to Scripture. Use a Bible or a Sunday Missal to read the gospel story of the week. Remember that there are variations in the different translations of the Bible. This is ok. Sometimes exploring the differences in the versions that your group use can enrich your reflections. As you reflect, ensure each person who wants to talk is given an opportunity to share. No one needs to talk unless they want to, and no one person should dominate the conversation.

RESPOND Each week we have the opportunity to respond. It may be a good time to assess our priorities and see how we are living our faith in the totality of our lives: in our families, in our relationships, in our work. We may not need to do more; we may need to do less. This is the time to look at how we are living the values of Jesus and perhaps to identify new behaviours and attitudes.

? WHAT IS THE LEADER OF YOUR GROUP EXPECTED TO DO?

Each community will have its own leader. A leader is not someone with all the answers who is there to put everybody else right. He or she is a fellow participant but with particular responsibility of facilitating the community by:

- Preparing ahead of the session and developing a warm, accepting and open environment
- Guiding the group and keeping it on track through the faith sharing process each week
- Sharing the various tasks among the members of the group
- Listening and, if necessary, asking questions to keep sharing moving
- Ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to speak
- Encouraging members to see the meeting not as a discussion group, but as an opportunity for sharing in which they might grow in faith

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR



In this faith sharing season, you will have the opportunity to consider Pope Francis' invitation to embrace the new World Day in our parishes. In his message for the day, the Pope says:



[The World Day of the Poor] should become a powerful appeal to our consciences as believers, allowing us to grow in the conviction that sharing with the poor enables us to understand the deepest truth of the Gospel. The poor are not a problem: they are a resource from which to draw as we strive to accept and practise in our lives the essence of the Gospel.

It is my wish that [around this World Day] Christian communities will make every effort to create moments of encounter and friendship, solidarity and concrete assistance. They can invite the poor and volunteers to take part together in the Eucharist on this Sunday."

As you share faith each week, and consider your personal response, consider also whether your small community can accept this invitation of Pope Francis. How can you create the moments of encounter and concrete action? Can you support others in the parish to do the same?

5. RESPOND

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice. With a reflection from Pope Francis, you will be invited to respond to what you have heard in the session. As the weeks progress, you'll also be invited to consider how to prepare for the World Day of the Poor.

🕒 15 mins

1. GATHER

🕒 30 mins

At the first meeting, introduce yourselves to each other. Thereafter, following your opening prayer, you will have an opportunity to catch up with one another, and share how last week's session influenced you.

2. EXPERIENCE

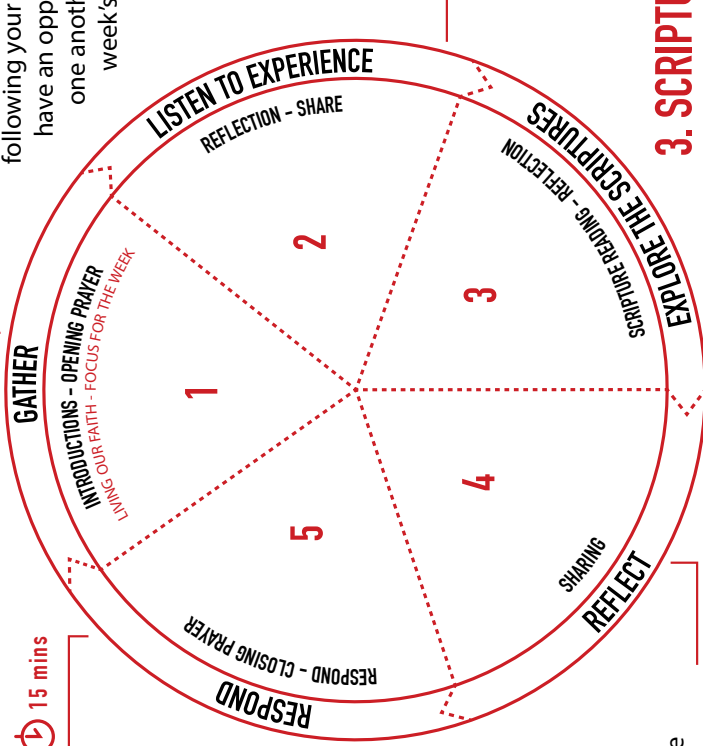
This part of the session is about 'your own story' and how it relates to the theme of the session. Having listened to a short reflection, you will be given the opportunity, with the help of questions, to share your own experience.

3. SCRIPTURE 🕒 45 mins

This part is about exploring 'God's story' in scripture. Having listened to the Gospel for the week, you will be invited to reflect on what you have heard.

4. REFLECT

This is an opportunity to reflect on 'our story' - God's story and your own story - and how to link the two together. What is the meaning for you? With the help of a reflection and questions, you will have the opportunity to share.





To prepare for this first session, take time to read *Faith sharing in a small community* and *Structure of the meeting* on pages 5-7.

As members of the Church, we are all called upon to preserve the dignity of all human beings in their life and work, to care for creation, to reach out to our sisters and brothers in need and to build community, solidarity and peace. These principles form part of Catholic social teaching and are central to our faith. They all begin from our mission to love.

The dignity of each and every human person is the foundation principle. We are all made lovingly in God's image and likeness. We are all sisters and brothers of one another. What flows from this is that every person we meet - family, friends, neighbours, strangers, people on the other side of the world - are also made in God's image and likeness. They deserve our love.

GATHER



At this first session, begin by introducing yourselves to each other. Share your names and a little about yourself.

The group leader invites the group to pray the Psalm together.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully
made.
Wonderful are your works.

Psalm 139: 1-5, 7-10, 13-14



LIVING OUR FAITH

Share something of why you have said yes to participating in this small community.



FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

- To consider the dignity of all God's people
- To identify some of the challenges in upholding people's dignity
- To choose concrete ways to overcome these challenges

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE



Karen proudly shows a picture of her daughter at her school leaving prom. "Isn't she just the most beautiful girl in the world?" Could there be anything more beautiful to Karen than what that photo represents? Karen has brought up two children and faced many challenges - moving across the country to give her children the best chance, working herself to the point of illness. Looking at this photo, she knows all the effort and sacrifice is nothing when compared to the glow of her daughter at her prom.

Karen spoke of taking her to the hairdressers, lavishing her hard-earned money on this special event. But as soon as they were back in the car, she'd stripped the flowers out of her hair and rearranged things to make the best of her daughter's features. For what parent wouldn't know each curve, each freckle, and even be able to recognise the distinctness of their child in the midst of a crowd? Beauty. Some would say this is subjective. For a parent, the awesomeness of their child is perhaps the most objective thing there is.

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- When have I known the true objective beauty of another person?
- What does this mean about other people's loved ones? Is there any difference in the value of another human person?
- If God created each one of us, what does this mean about his love for us?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Gospel passage for the 27th Sunday of the year (Cycle A).

Listen to Matthew 21:33-43.

REFLECT

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud.

We often listen to parables, especially challenging ones like this, and try to find an allegorical or symbolic meaning. We might say the landowner is God and Jesus is the son. But the first listeners to this parable may not have heard it like this. The farmers and workers listening to Jesus would have been sympathetic to the tenants. Many tenants suffered years of high rents and hard labour, all just to make the landowners richer. Those workers listening would have understood why the tenants were sending away the representatives of an oppressive landowner. But then comes the son. Seeing the heir arriving, the tenants may have assumed the father was dead. If they killed the son, the vineyard would transfer to them.

This gives a different view of the parable. The farmers and workers would have had sympathy with the tenants. Higher classes and religious leaders listening would have sympathised with the landowner. Jesus turns both of these views upside down. The father is not dead. The tenants cannot inherit. The rich landowner loses the most precious thing he had because of his neglect of his tenants. The tenants lose all - their lives - with the father's response.

Whatever our position, whoever we are, however we consider we are treated, we are still called to respect the dignity of others, to uphold their irreplaceable value, and, ultimately, to place their needs and aspirations above our own.

In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- How can I sometimes live like the landowner, overlooking people's dignity for my own gain? Or when do I act like the tenants, seeking a quick solution to my worries at the expense of others?
- Can I identify a time when I have chosen to love, despite challenges?

RESPOND

Pope Francis' message for the first World Day of the Poor highlights the principle of Catholic social teaching to promote human dignity:



The Son of God's way of loving is well-known... It stands on two pillars: God loved us first, and he loved us by giving completely of himself, even to laying down his life. Such love cannot go unanswered...

We know how hard it is for our contemporary world to see poverty clearly for what it is. Yet in myriad ways, poverty challenges us daily, in faces marked by suffering, marginalisation, oppression, violence, torture and imprisonment, war, deprivation of freedom and dignity, ignorance and illiteracy, medical emergencies and shortage of work, trafficking and slavery, exile, extreme poverty and forced migration. Poverty has the face of women, men and children exploited by base interests, crushed by the machinations of power and money."

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- Pope Francis highlights the many ways in which the dignity of God's people is undermined. Where do we see these examples of poverty and injustice?
- Who are the people in our own community who are neglected? In what ways might we put love into action and value their inner dignity?

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice.

- Consider how you greet others this week, remembering that each person is precious and created in the image and likeness of God
- How can you make the extra effort to recognise someone's true value? Perhaps going out of your way to make a colleague feel included in a social invitation, or making a phone call to bring real human contact into someone's day
- St Joseph's, Caritas. Can you find out more about the diocesan centre and outreach service working with people with learning disabilities? How could your support ensure that people's dignity is recognised no matter what their ability?
www.stjoseph.org.uk

CLOSING PRAYER

The leader invites people to join in the second half of the prayers.

- For the Church throughout the world. Lord God, hear our prayer
that the Church will always be a place that respects all people as your children.
- For people in positions of leadership in society. Lord God, hear our prayer
that they will always uphold the dignity of every person throughout the world.
- For people whose dignity is not upheld. Lord God, hear our prayer
that they will feel your love through the support of others.
- For people in our own community who are not respected, and who are unable to live their lives to the full. Lord God, hear our prayer
that they be filled with your grace and grow in courage and strength.

Heavenly Father,
Help us to see with your eyes, to judge with the
loving heart of your Son, Jesus Christ, and through your Spirit,
to put love in action.
Amen.



**HUMAN
DIGNITY**



Pope Francis's much quoted phrase about wanting "a poor church for the poor" holds the Catholic social teaching principle of the preferential option for the poor at its heart. This is wider than only undertaking works of charitable support. Pope Francis explains: "We are all called to be poor, to strip us of ourselves; and to do this we must learn how to be with the poor... The Christian is not one who speaks about the poor, no! He is one who encounters them, who looks them in the eye, who touches them." When this happens we are moved beyond only offering charity to accompanying people on their quest for justice. This means the whole Church together being a "voice for the voiceless", ensuring that the experience and needs of people living in poverty are heard in our society and in our world.

GATHER



Welcome any newcomers to the group and invite them to introduce themselves briefly to the others.

The group leader will invite the group to pray the Psalm together.

OPENING PRAYER

Praise the Lord!
Praise, O servants of the Lord;
praise the name of the Lord.

Blessed be the name of the Lord
from this time on and forevermore.
From the rising of the sun to its setting
the name of the Lord is to be praised.
The Lord is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens.

Psalm 139: 1-5, 7-10, 13-14

Who is like the Lord our God,
who is seated on high,
who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?
He raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.
Praise the Lord!



LIVING OUR FAITH

Share something of how last week's session has influenced you during the week. How did you put your faith into action?



FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

- To consider who is affected by poverty
- To recognise the gifts that people living in poverty bring
- To reflect on our response and to look towards World Day of the Poor

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE



The Catholic Church in this country has a great history of supporting people living in poverty overseas, especially through our support of CAFOD and Missio. This, of course, is something to celebrate and to continue to support. But it can make us feel that the poor are different from us, far away, people to be helped by our generosity. What of those living in poverty in our midst? You may be someone who is personally aware of the hardships of making ends meet. Or there may be others in your small community. There will certainly be people in your parish church on a Sunday. What's your real experience of people living in poverty? It's so much more than putting money in the charity collection box. Listen to one another. Hear each other's stories.

SHARE

The leader invites people to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- Who are the poor within our own community, whether visible or invisible? I might have experienced living in poverty myself - am I happy to share?
- What have I learnt through my encounter with people in poverty?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Gospel passage for the 28th Sunday of the year (Cycle A).

Listen to Matthew 22:1-14.

REFLECT

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud.

There are many meanings we can take from this gospel passage, but it may seem an uncomfortable parable. Jesus tells of the king killing the murderers of his servants. We might be able to understand this. However, the killing of the man who had no wedding garment seems brutal. At the last minute, the king had said that everyone was welcome to the banquet. So surely there would have been some people without the right clothes?

New understandings of the rural society around Jesus suggest that the first listeners to this parable may have heard other layers of meaning. They would have been aware that at a royal wedding the wedding garments are provided for the guests. So someone wrongly dressed at the feast was choosing to rebuke the gift of the king. The religious leaders, on hearing Jesus, would have understood his shocking double meaning; that all are welcome in the Kingdom of God, even those beyond the Jewish people, and all are offered the gift of God's love.

We too are welcome in the Kingdom. We can't be indifferent to this invitation. We must be ready to clothe ourselves in God's gift of love. Surely, also, we must be ready to make others feel welcome and recognise the God-given gifts that they bring?

In a few moments of silence, consider the following questions. Then share your reflections.

- How welcoming am I to those living in poverty?
- Am I open to encountering the gifts that they offer?

RESPOND

Pope Francis' message for the first World Day of the Poor highlights the principle of Catholic social teaching of the option for the poor:



We may think of the poor simply as the beneficiaries of our occasional volunteer work, or of impromptu acts of generosity that appease our conscience. However good and useful such acts may be... they ought to lead to a true encounter with the poor and a sharing that becomes a way of life...

Saint John Chrysostom's admonition remains ever timely: "Do not honour the Eucharistic Christ with silk vestments, and then, leaving the church, neglect the other Christ suffering from cold and nakedness." We are called, then, to draw near to the poor, to encounter them, to meet their gaze, to embrace them and to let them feel the warmth of love that breaks through their solitude. Their outstretched hand is also an invitation to step out of our certainties and comforts, and to acknowledge the value of poverty in itself."

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- Do I recognise the value of poverty itself?
- Pope Francis has invited every parish to celebrate the World Day of the Poor, and to truly "create moments of encounter and friendship". What do I think about this? Does it challenge me?

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice.

- Our lifestyles have consequences for many people. Think about two concrete ways in which you can change your daily actions so as to help those in poverty
- Whatever our own personal situations, there are always others that would benefit from our support. Can you volunteer to help a project? Have a look at the volunteering service at www.caritaswestminster.org.uk to find the right opportunity for you
- How can you respond to the Pope's invitation to celebrate the World Day of the Poor (see page 6)?

CLOSING PRAYER

The leader invites people to join in the second half of the prayers.

For our Church. Lord God, hear our prayer

that we will discern what it is to be a poor Church for the poor.

For all leaders in society. Lord God, hear our prayer

that they will open their eyes to the needs of people living in poverty.

For those living in poverty in our community, and in our world. Lord God, hear our prayer

that they will feel your love despite the sufferings they endure.

For our local community. Lord God, hear our prayer

that we will have the courage to place people living in poverty at the heart of all we do.

Heavenly Father,

Help us to see with your eyes, to judge with the loving heart of your Son, Jesus Christ, and through your Spirit, to put love in action.

Amen.

OPTION FOR THE POOR





Human beings exist in relation to one another. We're called to live with others, be aware of others, communicating, sharing, experiencing moments of joy and being there together in times of sadness. Each of us is called to look at the reality of the world in which we live. To pay attention to what is happening. To see how our sisters and brothers are being treated, and, how we ourselves are treating others. Reflecting on this, we're called to participate, to join in, to work alongside others for the common good of all. We are called to action; to be a positive presence in our communities; to love and say it with our lives.

GATHER



Welcome any newcomers to the group and invite them to introduce themselves briefly to the others.

The group leader will invite the group to pray the Psalm together.

OPENING PRAYER

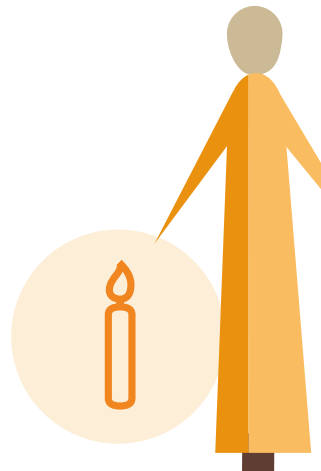
O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet.

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8: 1, 3-6, 9



LIVING OUR FAITH

Share something of how last week's session has influenced you during the week. How did you put your faith into action?



FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

- To ask what true community and participation looks like to us
- To consider what we can contribute for the work of building God's Kingdom

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE



The horrific fire at Grenfell Tower in West London in 2017 was an unprecedented tragedy. It is not surprising that so many people responded with such heartfelt sympathy and practical support. Within hours, we saw essential items lined up in church halls and community centres, arriving from around the country for those who had lost everything. One striking image was of rows and rows of shoes, ready for those who needed them.

It was a true outpouring of kindness and an example of the nature of the human spirit. We've seen similar responses during terror attacks, with people taking to social media to open their doors to strangers who are stranded. We come together in times of crisis to do what we can for our community.

But after the television news cameras have gone and after the shock has subsided, what of our community then? Are we left more welcoming and discerning of other's needs? If we had donated those shoes, would we welcome those same shoes back, filled with the feet of the homeless family arriving on our doorstep? Or might we say, 'rather not in my backyard'?

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- When have I been moved to act for a stranger in my community? What did I do?
- Do I venture beyond my comfort zone in getting involved to support others?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Gospel passage for the 29th Sunday of the year (Cycle A).

Listen to [Matthew 22:15-21](#).

REFLECT

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud.

This gospel passage highlights an unlikely alliance. We hear the Jewish leaders joining with the political leaders to achieve their common end, to rid themselves of Jesus. This false unity fails. Jesus sees through it and brilliantly answers their question, dismissing the trick and posing the real challenge of unity. In his response Jesus is saying that even when faced with things in society we don't agree with, we don't opt out. We still have to contribute and get involved. We're called to "pay unto Caesar" what is necessary to participate. It doesn't mean we compromise our beliefs, but we still seek 'common-unity' where possible. We give what we can for the betterment of society. And Jesus tells us that we give to God what belongs to God. That is, we give our whole selves. It is in this unity with the Lord that we find all we need, and where we will find unity with one another. We do not need false collaborations, like the Pharisees and Herodians, but a real coming together for the sake of God's world.

In a few moments of silence, consider the following questions. Then share your reflections.

- What am I reluctant to pay, or to contribute, to help build a more cohesive society?
- What part of me do I hold back from God, which could be of service to his work in the world?

RESPOND

Pope Francis' message for the first World Day of the Poor highlights Catholic social teaching's principle of the call to community and participation:

“All the poor – as Blessed Paul VI loved to say – belong to the Church by “evangelical right” and require of us a fundamental option on their behalf. Blessed, therefore, are the open hands that embrace the poor and help them: they are hands that bring hope. Blessed are the hands that reach beyond every barrier of culture, religion and nationality, and pour the balm of consolation over the wounds of humanity. Blessed are the open hands that ask nothing in exchange, with no ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’ or ‘maybes’. They are hands that call down God’s blessing upon their brothers and sisters.”

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- Do I really ask for nothing in return of helping others? No ‘ifs’, no ‘buts’, no ‘maybes’?
- What are my talents which I am called to use for the community?

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice.

- What barriers can you reach beyond, as individuals and as a small community, to help build a welcoming community this week?
- How have you decided to respond to the Pope’s invitation to celebrate the World Day of the Poor (see page 6)? Can you include a celebration of the diversity of your community? Maybe in the Mass, or in a multicultural event, to which all are welcome?

CLOSING PRAYER

The leader invites people to join in the second half of the prayers.

For our Church around the world, our diocese, and our parish. Lord God, hear our prayer
that we will be a welcoming community.

For leaders of society. Lord God, hear our prayer
that they will listen to and respond to the needs of all, especially those who are living in poverty.

For people who are struggling to find their role in the world. Lord God, hear our prayer
that they will discern the gifts you bestow on them, and be empowered to share them with others.

For our local community. Lord God, hear our prayer,
that with your help we may continue to work together to build your kingdom of love, truth and justice.

Heavenly Father,

Help us to see with your eyes, to judge with the loving heart of your Son, Jesus Christ, and through your Spirit, to put love in action.

Amen.



**COMMUNITY &
PARTICIPATION**



The right to work, to have a job, to earn money and so support our family are all central to the dignity of each individual. Catholic social teaching affirms that human beings are not merely a commodity or a tool as part of a process to make things. Human beings are greater than any thing. More than this, our work is a participation in the work of God, the God who created and works throughout history. Pope Francis tells us that “work... ‘anoints’ us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts”. The Pope explains there is “no worse material poverty... than the poverty which prevents people from earning their bread and deprives them of the dignity of work”.

GATHER



Welcome any newcomers to the group and invite them to introduce themselves briefly to the others.

The group leader will invite the group to pray the Psalm together.

OPENING PRAYER

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

O give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

O give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
who spread out the earth on the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

Psalm 8: 1, 3-6, 9



LIVING OUR FAITH

Share something of how last week's session has influenced you during the week. How did you put your faith into action?



FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

- To explore how work contributes to human dignity
- To consider how lack of work affects us, and what we can do about it

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE



John, a parishioner in north London, was frustrated with the lack of support for the thousands of refugees coming to Europe. He decided to share his home with a homeless migrant and approached the charity Housing Justice. It matched him with Mosi, an East African refugee. He had fled conflict to make the perilous journey to the UK, searching for a means to support himself. But his application for Refugee Status failed and funding for his night shelter ceased. Not allowed to work, he is now completely reliant on a small amount of money from Housing Justice and John's hospitality.

John explains: "When Mosi arrived at mine, his life had little structure. I looked for opportunities for him to establish a routine in a world where he is not able to work." John supported Mosi to enrol on a language course and he spends one afternoon a week learning English with John's son. Mosi now has a voluntary cleaning and kitchen support role, and attends a weekly international coffee club as well as his local church. "Mosi is significantly more confident than before," John says. "He recently passed an English exam and has established a network of friends outside my own."

Mosi's case for asylum has been poorly handled and there is hope that a judicial review may alter the decision not to grant him leave to remain. Only then will he be able to work and provide for himself.

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- How would I feel if I couldn't work and was completely reliant on others?
- What does work, paid or unpaid, contribute to people's dignity? Where do I see a lack of dignity for people in the working world?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Gospel passage for the 30th Sunday of the year (Cycle A).

Listen to Matthew 22:34-40.

REFLECT

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud.

Jesus' twofold 'law of love' - to love God and to love our neighbour - is so familiar it can easily wash over us. Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day, posed a challenge which shakes us out of this familiarity: "You only love God as much as the person you love the least." When we view Jesus' command like this, it provides a practical means to consider how well we are doing in our faithfulness to God and each other. Who are the least in our lives? Who are those who we forget, or who society oppresses?

In the first reading for this Sunday the Lord tells Moses: "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 22:21). The Lord's command to Moses reminds us that our families were likely all aliens, all strangers in this land, once. Yet many of us reading this are now welcome, will have the right to work and be able to contribute to our own wellbeing and to society. Most of us will be free from oppression.

However, there are many in our local communities without the means to support themselves, feeling oppressed by their immigration or employment status, their ability to work due to illness or disability, or unable to find a job. If we do nothing, do these people become those whom we love the least?

In a few moments of silence, consider the following questions. Then share your reflections.

- Where are our families from? What family names are present in the group? Do we know the country of origin?
- How would I feel if I needed to leave my home to go in search of a better life?
- How do I really feel about welcoming the migrant worker and ensuring they are not oppressed?

RESPOND

Pope Francis' message for the first World Day of the Poor highlights the principle of Catholic social teaching to uphold the dignity of workers:



Tragically, in our own time, even as ostentatious wealth accumulates in the hands of the privileged few, often in connection with illegal activities and the appalling exploitation of human dignity, there is a scandalous growth of poverty in broad sectors of society throughout our world. Faced with this scenario, we cannot remain passive, much less resigned. There is a poverty that stifles the spirit of initiative of so many young people by keeping them from finding work. There is a poverty that dulls the sense of personal responsibility and leaves others to do the work while we go looking for favours. There is a poverty that poisons the wells of participation and allows little room for professionalism; in this way it demeans the merit of those who do work and are productive. To all these forms of poverty we must respond with a new vision of life and society."

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- How do I contribute to this inequality that Pope Francis highlights?
- In what practical ways, no matter how small, can our treatment of others help to build a new vision of life and society?

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice.

- No matter anyone's political opinions, there is no room for oppression. Yet it is easy for our own attitudes and comments to contribute to people feeling oppressed and unwelcome. How can you be welcoming this week? Are you prepared to challenge other people's prejudice against 'the stranger'?
- There are many organisations who work tirelessly for people arriving in our country needing help so that they can eventually support themselves. Volunteers, with varying time commitments, are always welcome, from providing one-off help, to hosting someone in your home. See the Jesuit Refugee Service (www.jrs.net) and Housing Justice (www.housingjustice.org.uk)

- How can you include the things you have talked about today in your response to the Pope's invitation to celebrate the World Day of the Poor (see page 6)?

CLOSING PRAYER



The leader invites people to join in the second half of the prayers.

- For the Church throughout the world. Lord God, hear our prayer
that with your help, the Church's voice will be heard as it upholds the dignity of all people.
- For all people who hold public office. Lord God, hear our prayer
that they will act to ensure all people find dignified work, with a just wage, and proper working conditions.
- For those who are unemployed. Lord God, hear our prayer
that they will know your love and find strength through the support of those around them.
- For our local community. Lord God, hear our prayer
that we will show your love to others by welcoming the stranger and supporting those who are seeking work.

Heavenly Father,

Help us to see with your eyes, to judge with the loving heart of your Son, Jesus Christ, and through your Spirit, to put love in action.

Amen.



DIGNITY OF WORKERS



St John Paul II said that solidarity “is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good”. So solidarity is not just feeling sorry for those who suffer; it is a commitment to action. If we truly believe that we are all sisters and brothers of one another, made in God’s image and likeness, then seeking the good of one another cannot be ignored. Peace flows from this. Peace is not just the absence of conflict, it is the way we treat one another. It is the respect we afford to our fellow human beings. It is enabling all people to flourish and live their lives to the full. It is being open to true dialogue with our neighbours, whatever their beliefs, however different they may seem from us. It is using eyes of love to see our neighbours, and then putting that love into action.

GATHER



Welcome any newcomers to the group and invite them to introduce themselves briefly to the others.

The group leader will invite someone to lead the opening prayer.

OPENING PRAYER

To you, Creator of nature and humanity, of truth and beauty, I pray:

Hear my voice, for it is the voice of the victims of all wars and violence among individuals and nations.

Hear my voice, for it is the voice of all children who suffer and will suffer when people put their faith in weapons and war.

Hear my voice, when I beg you to instil into the hearts of all human beings the wisdom of peace, the strength of justice and the joy of fellowship.

Hear my voice, for I speak for the multitudes in every country and every period of history who do not want war and are ready to walk the road of peace.

Hear my voice and grant insight and strength so that we may always respond to hatred with love, to injustice with total dedication to justice, to need with sharing of self, to war with peace.

Oh God, hear my voice, and grant unto the world your everlasting peace.

Saint John Paul II’s ‘Cry for Peace’



LIVING OUR FAITH

Share something of how last week's session has influenced you during the week. How did you put your faith into action?



FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

- To recognise that we are not separated by difference
- To explore what peace means in practical terms
- To commit ourselves to promoting solidarity and building peace

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE



In June 2017, millions of people came together across the UK in their local neighbourhoods for the Great Get Together, in honour of the MP Jo Cox. After Jo was killed a year previously, her first speech in parliament became a kind of rallying cry to us all: "We are far more united, and have far more in common with each other, than things that divide us." In a time where we could choose to hide away in fear of the next act of terror, millions took up the invitation to seek the good in one another and to unite across ethnicities and faiths, standing together in celebration.

We used to come together without needing encouragement. In the innocence of childhood, before we were aware of difference and culture, how often did we end up playing on the beach or in the playground with other children - strangers - who may have looked, acted or spoken differently from us? Sometimes, as we get older, we might find it hard to see beyond the differences. The Great Get Together helped many to overcome this, but there's more to be done.

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- Where in my daily life do I encounter people of different cultures, faiths and backgrounds? In what ways do I see the good in them?
- When do other people's differences become more prominent to us, than that what could unite us?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Gospel passage for the 31st Sunday of the year (Cycle A).

Listen to Matthew 23:1-12.

REFLECT

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud.

Jesus gives his disciples an example of what it looks like to act without solidarity. He points to the Pharisees in their respected position of authority. They demand so much from others, but are unwilling to take on those burdens themselves. In the first reading the Lord asks "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another?" (Malachi 2:10). To be faithful to one another is to act in solidarity. Jesus instructs us how to do this. We must be humble, becoming servants to others, putting them first. For when we are willing to serve the other, we will seek the good in them, and uphold their dignity. This will allow peace to flourish.

In a few moments of silence, consider the following questions. Then share your reflections.

- When am I pleased that others are working for the common good, but I find it hard to act myself?
- What does faithfulness look like for me? My faithfulness to my loved ones or to a stranger? Is there a difference? Why?

RESPOND

Pope Francis' message for the first World Day of the Poor highlights the principle of Catholic social teaching to promote solidarity and peace:



The earliest community realised that being a disciple of Jesus meant demonstrating fraternity and solidarity... In his letter, [the Apostle James] spares no words: "Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor man... What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled', without giving them the things needed for the body; what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has not works, is dead" (James 2:5-6.14-17)."

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- How does this message from Pope Francis challenge me? What picture of solidarity is the Pope presenting?
- What does 'Go in peace' mean? How can I say it in words and action?

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice.

- How many languages do you speak in your small community? Can you teach one another how to greet others, creating moments of welcome and encounter?
- Pope Francis wishes that parishes will "make every effort to create moments of encounter and friendship, solidarity and concrete assistance" around the World Day of the Poor. How can you do this?

CLOSING PRAYER

The leader invites people to join in the second half of the prayers.

For the Church. Lord God, hear our prayer

that in all its actions the Church will be a visible example of your son, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

For world leaders. Lord God, hear our prayer

that they will seek an end to conflicts.

For all people experiencing violence in their lives. Lord God, hear our prayer

that they will experience the gift of your peace.

For our local community. Lord God, hear our prayer

that with your help, we will face all that holds us back from peace and become peacemakers.

Heavenly Father,

Help us to see with your eyes, to judge with the loving heart of your Son, Jesus Christ, and through your Spirit, to put love in action.

Amen.



**SOLIDARITY
AND PEACE**



The earth and all it contains has been created by God. It is a gift, given to all, for the good of all. And in the gift we experience something of the Giver – of the love of God. So there are two main aspects in considering the call to care for creation. First we must respect the resources the earth contains as gifts for all people of today, to be preserved for future generations. We are also called to care for creation simply because in creation we experience the generosity of God.

GATHER



Welcome any newcomers to the group and invite them to introduce themselves briefly to the others.

The group leader will invite the group to pray the Psalm together.

OPENING PRAYER

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for he commanded and they were created.
He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be
passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.

Psalm 148:1-13



LIVING OUR FAITH

Share something of how last week's session has influenced you during the week. How did you put your faith into action?



FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

- To consider how our actions have consequences for God's creation
- To reflect on where we see God in creation
- To decide how we can respond to the call to care for creation

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE



There has been a lot of coverage in the international news about the Paris Climate Accord. Focus has been on the responsibilities of world leaders to honour the 2015 agreement to meet targets to help reduce global warming. Children from around the world, living in areas experiencing the effects of climate change, met to send a message to the world leaders as they gathered in Paris. They said: "We are kids and we like to play and sing and dance. But we will fight to save our world. We are kids seeing our schools float away, we see ice melting and starving polar bears in our land, we see our water wells drying up, we see typhoons hitting our homes and we see big people cutting down our trees. You adults are giving us a world of chaos and we are scared. That's why we are here to say to adults: Act like us kids and fight to save the world."

Millions of children put their hope, not just in those world leaders, but also in us. The way we treat creation leads to the harm both of it, and of those living in it. Our destruction of the earth for quick gain has repercussions for people now and for the generations to come.

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- How do my actions contribute to the destruction of God's creation?
- What consequences do these actions have?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Gospel passage for the 32nd Sunday of the year (Cycle A).

Listen to Matthew 25:1-13.

REFLECT

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud.

This parable was told privately by Jesus to his disciples. You can almost hear him appealing to them to “Keep awake”. Be ready, stay prepared. He wants those disciples, his Church, us, to be ready with the lamps. He wants us to be casting light on the world when He, Jesus, the bridegroom arrives. The foolish bridesmaids took no oil with them. They were not taking care of their task, to lead the procession of the bridegroom when he arrived at midnight. What then of us? Are we taking care of all that has been entrusted to us? If we believe that God created the world and all that is in it, and we have been entrusted to be masters over all the earth (Genesis 1), then we have real responsibility. As Jesus’ disciples we must be ready to say “Look, the bridegroom is here”. Where do we see God in this world? How do we show him to others? To do this, we must first care for the world and for all that is in it.

Like the bridesmaids, we’ll be answerable on how well we do this to our children, to the generations after, and when we greet the bridegroom.

In a few moments of silence, consider the following questions. Then share your reflections.

- Do I link the task to care for creation to my faith?
- Where do I recognise God in his creation?

RESPOND

Pope Francis' message for the first World Day of the Poor highlights the principle of Catholic social teaching to care for creation:

“ I invite the whole Church, and men and women of good will everywhere, to turn their gaze on [the World Day of the Poor] to all those who stretch out their hands and plead for our help and solidarity. They are our brothers and sisters, created and loved by the one Heavenly Father. This day is meant, above all, to encourage believers to react against a culture of discard and waste, and to embrace the culture of encounter. At the same time, everyone, independent of religious affiliation, is invited to openness and sharing with the poor, through concrete signs of solidarity and fraternity. God created the heavens and the earth for all; yet sadly some have erected barriers, walls and fences, betraying the original gift meant for all humanity, with none excluded.”

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- How do I respond to the thought of people overseas stretching their hands to me pleading for solidarity to care for the earth?
- What does a culture of discard and waste look like? How can I begin to build a culture of encounter?

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice.

- The LiveSimply Parish Award is an opportunity for Catholic communities to respond to Pope Francis' invitation in *Laudato Si'* to “work with generosity and tenderness in protecting this world which God has entrusted to us”. It is awarded to communities who can show how they have been living simply, in solidarity with people in poverty and sustainably with creation. See www.cafod.org.uk/livesimply and consider if you can encourage your parish on this journey.
- How have you decided to respond to the Pope's invitation to celebrate the World Day of the Poor (see page 6)? Are all your plans in place?

CLOSING PRAYER

The leader invites people to join in the second half of the prayers.

For the Church. Lord God, hear our prayer

that we may proclaim that creation is your gift to us, and lovingly care for the earth.

For those in authority around the world. Lord God, hear our prayer

that they will look to the protection of the planet over immediate profit.

For people suffering the effects of a changing climate. Lord God, hear our prayer

that they will experience your love through our solidarity and support.

For our local community. Lord God, hear our prayer

that we will renew our connection with the Earth.

Heavenly Father,

Help us to see with your eyes, to judge with the loving heart of your Son, Jesus Christ, and through your Spirit, to put love in action.

Amen.



**CARE OF
CREATION**

If you're inspired by this journey through the Church's social teaching, please explore how your parish or community can engage more through *Love in Action*.

See stepforwardinlove.org



LOVE IN ACTION



RESOURCES



SUGGESTED READING LIST

1891 RERUM NOVARUM

On the condition of workers written by Leo XIII is often referred to as the first document of modern Catholic Social Teaching. It focuses on the challenges to workers following the industrial revolution and promotes the dignity of work.

1931 QUADRAGESIMO ANNO

The Reconstruction of Social Order written by Pius XI to mark the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. It looks at the abuse of capitalism and socialism, and urges that workers should have freedom to form associations, stressing the need for solidarity and cooperation.

1963 PACEM IN TERRIS

Peace on earth. John XXIII, written in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis and during some of the worst expressions of the Cold War period. This encyclical is addressed to "all people of good will" and is concerned with nuclear weapons, racism, poverty and abuse of human rights.

1965 GAUDIUM ET SPES

Joy & hope, a part of Vatican II's Church in the Modern World, announcing the duty to 'read the signs of the times', encouraging all people to interpret the world in the light of the Gospel.

1967 POPULORUM PROGRESSIO

The Progress of Peoples. This was the first to speak of 'justice' rather than 'charity' and introduces the phrase 'Peace is the new word for development'.

1981 LABOREM EXERCENS

On Human Work came very much from the experience and the heart of Pope John Paul II. It presents a critique of the nature of work, and the conflict between labour and property.

2009 CARITAS IN VERITATE

Charity in truth. Pope Benedict's encyclical included a focus on the global financial crisis. The human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.

2013 EVANGELII GAUDIUM

The Joy Of The Gospel. Pope Francis published his *Apostolic Exhortation* in 2013. It is full of challenges to all of us as to how we live, what our priorities are, the financial system, and what true development is all about.

2015 LAUDATO SI'

On Care For Our Common Home. Pope Francis' letter is on the care of our common world. All of these teachings and more have been brought together in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

WEBSITES

Links to all of these documents and further reading can be found on catholicsocialteaching.org.uk. The website provides links to many other organisations, ideas for action and for prayer.

Activities for young people, exploring Catholic social teaching and ways to put it into practice are provided by millionminutes.org

VOLUNTEERING

The Caritas Volunteer Service makes volunteering as easy as possible for the Catholic community in London and Hertfordshire, providing information about volunteering opportunities across the Diocese of Westminster. See the Volunteer service at caritaswestminster.org.uk



STEP FORWARD IN LOVE

Pope Francis has frequently issued the invitation to go beyond our church buildings and to 'step forward in love'. The Pope has instituted a new 'World Day of the Poor'. He asks all of us, whatever our means or background, to unite in love, in acts of service to one another and in genuine encounter.

This booklet is an opportunity to prepare for that encounter. The six sessions will invite you to explore some of the themes of Catholic social teaching and explore how your faith in a God of love calls you to respond.

God our loving Father,

*From living stones, your chosen people,
you built an eternal Church to your glory.*

*We thank you for the gifts of your Spirit that you have
given to your Church.*

*Continue to pour on us your grace,
so that together we may grow as your faithful people.*

*Give us eyes to see your Son in others,
and a heart of love to respond to the needs of our community.*

We ask this through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

LO VE.



Diocese of Westminster
AGENCY FOR EVANGELIZATION



Caritas
Westminster