



**PASTORAL LETTER ON CARITAS LEEDS
'FAITH THROUGH LOVING SERVICE'**

First World Day of the Poor - Sunday 19th November 2017

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has instituted this Sunday, the Thirty-third in Ordinary Time, as the first World Day of the Poor. In his message to us today, he says: *"At the conclusion of the Jubilee of Mercy, I wanted to offer the Church a World Day of the Poor, so that throughout the world Christian communities can become an ever greater sign of Christ's charity for the least and those most in need. To the World Days instituted by my Predecessors, which are already a tradition in the life of our communities, I wish to add this one, which adds to them an exquisitely evangelical fullness, that is, Jesus' preferential love for the poor"*.

Central to Pope Francis' message is to *"invite the whole Church, and men and women of good will everywhere, to turn their gaze on this day to all those who stretch out their hands and plead for our help and solidarity"*. *"They are our brothers and sisters,"* he says, *"...created and loved by the one Heavenly Father"*. The Holy Father goes on to say that this World Day of the Poor, *"...is meant, above all, to encourage believers to react against a culture of discard and waste, and to embrace the culture of encounter."*

As a Church, Pope Francis wishes us to give expression to our faith *"...by following Jesus in his own poverty"*, to *"encounter"* the poor and to make *"...a fundamental option on their behalf"*; he asks us *"...to meet their gaze, to embrace them and to let them feel the warmth of love that breaks through their solitude"*. This means praying for the poor, listening to their needs, and supporting them through *"concrete initiatives"* and practical deeds.

At the end of September this year, I launched 'Caritas Leeds'; an initiative whereby we, as members of one local diocesan Church, can serve Our Lord Jesus Christ who lives now in the poor and in those in need within our diocese. This initiative was in response to a resolution of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales: *"...to explore the possible creation and development of appropriate local 'Caritas' structures, and to further local collaboration of existing work"* with the aim of *"deepening the Church's social engagement at the service of the gospel"*ⁱ It was also in response to a subsequent development in the Universal Church of a legislative framework which encourages, *"...the diocesan Bishop...to establish in the Church entrusted to his care, an Office to direct and coordinate the service of charity in his name"*ⁱⁱ.

'Caritas' is the name given by the Catholic Church, internationally, nationally and at a diocesan level to an organised and co-ordinated expression of the Church's ministry of charity and its service to the poor and to those in need. The Church is called to exercise this ministry of charity at all levels, namely in small local Church communities such as the parish, at the level of the local diocesan Church, and on the national and international levels.

In this country, the Catholic Church's ministry of charity overseas is carried out through the work of CAFOD, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. At a national level, it is represented by the work and co-ordination of CSAN, Caritas Social Action Network. Now, at a diocesan level, the organised and co-ordinated expression of our collective ministry of charity will be given expression through the work of Caritas Leeds, fostering a more collaborative approach across parishes and facilitate diocesan wide initiatives. Caritas Leeds will support, promote and enhance - not replace or take over - the incredible work that is already being done by so many Catholic associations like Catholic Care and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, as well as local deanery and parish projects, in the mission of charity and in the service of the poor.

Caritas Leeds will enable us to coordinate more effectively our response as a diocesan community to the needs of children, families, the elderly, disabled, and those suffering from mental health conditions; the needs of the homeless, refugees, victims of human trafficking, and those who are trapped in modern-day slavery. These are just a few of the needs and new forms of poverty present in our diocese.

On this first World Day of the Poor, I hope you will pray with me that Caritas Leeds will help us, as a diocesan community, to translate Our Lord's command to love our neighbour, and to serve Him in the poor, into a more prayerful and co-ordinated practical action. I hope too that as clergy and religious, families and individuals, and as parish communities, you will be inspired to learn more about Caritas Leeds and to take as full a part as possible in this important expression of the Church's social mission in our diocese.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Poorⁱⁱⁱ, intercede for us as we seek to serve her Son in the poor and those on the margins of our society, and as we strive to give witness to our 'faith through loving service', which is the motto for Caritas Leeds.

+ Marcus

✠ Marcus

Bishop of Leeds

Given at Leeds on the Solemnity of All Saints and appointed to be read, and made available, in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on the first World Day of the Poor, 18th and 19th November, in the Year of Our Lord 2017.



The Diocesan Coordinator for Caritas Leeds is Rev Dr Joseph Cortis
St Monica's, Hinsley Hall, Headingley Lane, Leeds LS6 2BX

Email: joseph.cortis@dioceseofleeds.org.uk, Web: www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk

ⁱ Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Plenary Assembly, November 2011

ⁱⁱ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Intima Ecclesiae Natura*, 'On the Service of Charity' November 2012

ⁱⁱⁱ Our Lady of the Poor is a popular title given to the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Banneux (Belgium), also known as Our Lady of Banneux, a cult officially approved by the Holy See in 1949