



PASTORAL MESSAGE FROM BISHOP MARCUS REGARDING THE DESIGNATION OF CATHOLIC CARE AS CARITAS LEEDS FROM AUGUST 2023

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (Epistle of St James 2:14-17)

Integral to our lives as disciples of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the witness we give to the love and mercy of God; this means our faith must be given expression through loving service, through our works of charity, our ‘caritas’. Through serving those in need, we give testimony to our faith. The Holy Father Pope Francis describes it in this way: *“Charity – caritas – is our very life; it is what makes us “be” what we are. When we embrace God’s love and when we love one another in him, we plumb the depths of our identity, as individuals and as Church, and the meaning of our existence. We understand not only how important our own lives are, but also how precious too are the lives of others. We perceive clearly how every life is unique and inalienable, a marvel in the eyes of God.”* (Address to International Leaders of Caritas, May 2013)

As an expression of the life and mission of the Church, Pope Benedict XVI taught us that: *“The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”* (Deus Caritas Est, §25)

The exercise of charity (caritas) therefore, is not only integral to the life of every baptised person but is an important constitutive element of the Church’s mission; it is, *“the ordered expression of love of neighbour within the communion and mission of the Church”*. Pope Francis teaches that caritas is *“an essential part of the Church”* and *“institutionalizes love in the Church”*. Caritas has two dimensions: one of action and a divine dimension *“situated in the heart of the Church.”* Consequently, the Church is called to exercise a mission 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.

When ‘Caritas Leeds’ was launched in 2017, it was formed following a collegiate decision taken by the Bishops of England and Wales to develop in each diocese a practical response to the apostolic mandate given by Pope Benedict XVI in *Intima Ecclesiae Natura*, ‘On the Service of Charity’. This Apostolic Letter stated that: *“Wherever necessary, due to the number and variety of initiatives, the diocesan Bishop is to establish in the Church entrusted to his care, an Office to direct and coordinate the service of charity in his name”*. In this diocese, we decided to establish initially an umbrella ‘forum’, convened by a Co-ordinator under the direction of the Diocesan Bishop. The purpose of this diocesan forum was to give a co-ordinated expression to the ministry of charity which was being exercised already by many groups, associations and organisations providing charitable outreach to the poor and those in need in the diocese.

The past six years have seen some significant developments of that vision and as a ‘forum’ Caritas Leeds has helped many people in the diocese to appreciate the remarkable work that has been and is being done by the Church in addressing areas of need. Some of this work has been captured in a recent report written by Rev Dr Joseph Cortis, and who was appointed as the initial Co-ordinator for Caritas Leeds: <https://www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk/caritas/>.

When it was launched, I stated that we would “...need to refine how Caritas Leeds will operate most effectively within the context of our diocese; this will take time.” As a consequence of the good work done by Dr Cortis, I believe that now the time is right for me to designate Catholic Care as the corporate agency, ‘Caritas Leeds’, which will provide in my name the ongoing direction and coordination of the service of charity in this diocese.

The charitable objects of Catholic Care are: “To promote within the Catholic Diocese of Leeds the relief of poverty and distress among children and all those who through economic or family circumstances or physical or mental affliction are in need of such relief” and, “To promote and organise co-operation among Catholics and others in the achievement of the above.” These objects and Catholic Care’s incorporated status make it well placed to undertake its canonical responsibilities as the Bishop’s agent in exercising “his proper pastoral solicitude for the service of charity in the particular Church entrusted to him as its Pastor, guide and the one primarily responsible for that service” (*Intima Ecclesiae natura*, Art. 4 §1); and to give an organisational expression to the collective social mission of the diocese.

Designated as Caritas Leeds, Catholic Care will assist me, together with the clergy, religious and lay faithful of our diocese to encourage and support “the initiatives and works of service to neighbour” and encourage “in the faithful the spirit of practical charity as an expression of the Christian life and sharing in the mission of the Church” (*Intima Ecclesiae Natura*, Art. 4 §2). This will be done by Catholic Care taking responsibility for providing a regular forum (perhaps annually) where representatives from those parish projects providing charitable outreach can come together to: identify new or specific areas of need within the Diocese of Leeds and to discuss how best to work to satisfy those needs collaboratively across parishes and deaneries; and, to share and celebrate the various charitable initiatives undertaken throughout the diocese. Working collaboratively with the Vicariate for Education, Catholic Care will encourage those who are actively engaged in the Church’s charitable works to reflect on, and deepen their knowledge of, Catholic Social Teaching.

Additionally, Catholic Care will be able to encourage and support good care practice in organised parish charitable initiatives; and provide guidance and training when requested to existing parishes or to parishes wishing to organise new charitable initiatives. As an agency with many years of experience and the benefit of professionally qualified staff, Catholic Care is in a strong position to undertake these responsibilities as Caritas Leeds.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Rev Dr Joseph Cortis for all the work he has done as the founding Co-ordinator for Caritas Leeds. The role of the Co-ordinator will now be incorporated into the work of Catholic Care by its Director, Mrs Carol Hill.

I commend to you ‘Catholic Care – Caritas Leeds’ and the Church’s mission of charity which it undertakes, and I ask you to pray for the future of its work within our diocese.

✠ **Marcus Stock**
Bishop of Leeds

This Message is given at Leeds on the Feast of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus, 29th July 2023 and is appointed to be made available in all churches and chapels of the diocese at any time over the weekends of 29th & 30th July, 5th & 6th August or 12th & 13th August 2023.