

Caritas Leeds responds to Pope Francis' call to holiness with pledges of action on criminal justice and youth leadership in 2019



Headlines:

Caritas Leeds brought together Catholics involved in charities and social action in the Diocese of Leeds for a unique gathering that combined liturgy, reflection, grassroots decision-making and planning for action on Saturday 6th October.

The **Faith in Action: Joy and Challenge'** event at Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College in Leeds saw Caritas Leeds take the interesting step of inviting lay and ordained Catholics to vote and set the priorities for social action in the Diocese.

The event began with Bishop Marcus leading a liturgy focused on the Beatitudes, which can be likened to 'a Christian identity card'. He spoke about the roots of Caritas Leeds and restated the importance of Diocesan social action being coordinated and focused to maximise impact.

John Battle led a reflection on Pope Francis' latest exhortation 'Gaudete et Exultate' (on the Call to Holiness in Today's World'). Drawing from the richness of this exhortation he highlighted: *'To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything that we do, wherever we find ourselves...Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain'*. (paragraph 14) . Directly linking this to Caritas Leeds, he also referred to paragraph 96 which states that *'Holiness, then is not about swooning in mystic rapture...in this call to recognise him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices which every saint seeks to imitate'*.

After a period of personal reflections, participants took part in workshops exploring key issues facing the following people in the diocese: families and young people, prisoners and ex-offenders, people living with disabilities and homeless people. After hearing testimonies from witnesses with some experience of working with each group, participants worked together to identify needs the Diocese might take to

address social injustices. These proposals were discussed and put to a vote to identify 2 new priorities for the Diocese's social action work in 2019, which will be coordinated by Caritas Leeds.

The chosen priorities were:

- **Families and Young People** – Develop Youth Leadership in our Diocese.
- **Prisoners/Ex-offenders** - Launching a Leeds Diocesan Criminal Justice Forum

Caritas Leeds commits to organise an engaging action plan to support schools, parishes, associations and chaplaincies to participate in effective campaigning and social action on these issues.

Caritas Leeds is inviting Catholics to help develop an engaging action plan for these pertinent and challenging proposals, which will now sit alongside existing schemes focusing on asylum seekers/refugees and becoming a Dementia Friendly Diocese, as Diocesan priorities for social action. They come at an opportune time given the Synod of Bishops on Youth is taking place in Rome and Pope Francis' call for an inclusive Church.

The points raised from the workshops on Homeless and People Living with Disabilities will be shared and promoted through the Caritas Leeds Ambassadors network.

After the workshops, the participants heard Jessica Wilkinson, Leeds Diocesan Youth Officer, introduce the new 'Faith in Action' award which is now available for all young people, following a successful pilot last academic year. The award, which a young person can secure through their parish or school helps them develop their Catholic identity through prayer, pilgrimage, social action and parish practice.

The day ended with Rachel Walker from Growing Old Gracefully encouraging Catholics to take personal actions that contribute towards making Leeds a 'Dementia Friendly Diocese'.

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