

Message to launch Caritas Diocese of Brentwood – full version For Masses on 17th/18th November

“Blessed 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.”

These powerful words from Pope Francis were written last year, for the first World Day of the Poor; a year later, his message for today takes its theme from Psalm 34, “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him.” Pope Francis reminds us, “The Lord listens to the poor who cry out to him ... those whose hearts are broken by sadness, loneliness and exclusion.”

We are the people who are to put Pope Francis’ words into action: to be the hands that reach across barriers; to be open hands, serving the poor; and to be ears that listen with the compassion of Christ to the sad and the lonely, the excluded and the isolated.

Bishop Alan spends most weeks visiting parishes and schools, homeless hostels and other outreach projects, and he writes, “I am deeply moved by the generosity of spirit that I see as I travel around the Diocese. There are so many people who are volunteering to help others. As well as parish and ecumenical groups, there are also many, many people who are caring for relatives at home and in hospital. There are countless acts of kindness and love carried out in the name of Jesus Christ every day. It is a powerful blessing for the Diocese.”

Throughout the last year a small group of people have been working to create Caritas Diocese of Brentwood, and this new organisation is launched today, serving Essex and East London. This came about directly from one of the 12 Strands of renewal that we have all been working with as part of the Stewards of the Gospel process. The word caritas means charity, in the fullest sense of Christian love, and our Diocesan Caritas exists to support and encourage everyone who is working to put Christ’s love into action by supporting the ill, the poor and the marginalised. There is a new website, caritasbrentwood.org, and this is a great tool for people who want to be volunteers. Type in where you live and the kind of project where you would like to offer help, and the website will show you these projects in your area. Our Caritas is part of a national and international network, and once a year will bring together as many people as possible who are volunteering in the Diocese for a day of networking, sharing good practice, training and celebrating success.

The first conversation about Caritas Diocese of Brentwood happened at Walsingham House at Abbotswick on 31st January 2018. That is significant, because it is the Feast of St John Bosco, the Patron Saint of the young. One of the distinctive features of our Caritas is that from the beginning it has been designed to include people of all

generations. Social Justice motivates young people in a very particular way – they bring freshness and passion, and often suggest new approaches. Those of different generations bring the wisdom of years; a depth of experience that is a vital part of our work with the poorest and most marginalised. Caritas Diocese of Brentwood includes many, many groups that would love volunteers of all ages, and through the Caritas website and network we hope the links between generations are forged and strengthened in the years ahead.

Thanks to the people who helped to establish Caritas Diocese of Brentwood we decided that an initiative that would span many aspects of our work would be to promote the Real Living Wage. On 1st November we heard the excellent news that the Diocese of Brentwood had been accredited by the Living Wage Foundation as a Living Wage Employer; the Living Wage is higher than the National Minimum Wage, and set at a level which lifts people out of poverty. If you are an employer, or can influence your company, please look into the Living Wage. Right now, there are many families in Essex and East London where both adults work, but the family still relies on benefits and even food banks because wage rates are so low. Receiving the Living Wage transforms lives and ends the misery of struggling on the breadline.

Bishop Alan says, “I am delighted to endorse the Living Wage, and I am launching Caritas Diocese of Brentwood today full of hope about the difference it will make to all our work for social justice, in the name of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis asks us to ‘go to the edges’ and Caritas is full of projects which do just that. I encourage every parishioner to look at the website and to get involved in any way that they can.”

In this message for the launch of Caritas Diocese of Brentwood, the final word goes to Pope Francis, from his letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, (‘The Joy of the Gospel’). “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation of the poor, promoting the cause of the poor, and enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we are attentive to the cry of the poor and come to their aid.”

All those involved in Caritas Diocese of Brentwood ask for your prayers.

Our Lady of Compassion, **Pray for us**

St Francis of Assisi, **Pray for us**

St Mother Teresa of Calcutta, **Pray for us**

St Martin de Porres, **Pray for us**

St John Bosco, **Pray for us**

Steven Webb and Fr Dominic Howarth

18th November 2018