



**PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE GOOD SHEPHERD APPEAL
ANNUAL APPEAL FOR CATHOLIC CARE, SUNDAY MASSES 18TH/19TH MARCH 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In his Angelus Message for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and the World Day of Peace on 1st January 2023, the Holy Father Pope Francis spoke of the importance for Christians to:

“...learn the language of love, which is ‘to take care of’. This is the commitment: to take care of our lives, of our time, of our souls; to take care of creation and the environment we live in; and even more, to take care of our neighbour, of those who the Lord has placed alongside us, as well as our brothers and sisters who are in need and who call for our attention and compassion.”

There is ‘an unbreakable bond between the love of God and the love of neighbour’ such that ‘closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God.’ⁱ

We live in very challenging times. Following our recent experience of the pandemic and the suffering it brought, we are now living through a cost-of-living crisis. Each one of us has seen our food and heating costs spiral. But for many of our neighbours, including families with children, the current financial pressures are pushing them deeper into poverty and they are faced with the stark choices of ‘heating or eating’.

Catholic Care is the principal organisation founded by the Diocese of Leeds to give concrete expression to the Church’s mission of *caritas* (charity) in our parishes and local communities. *Caritas* is the loving service of those in need, and it is an indispensable part of what it means to follow Christ and to be Catholic. It is a tangible example of that ‘unbreakable bond between the love of God and the love of neighbour’.

Catholic Care tries to hear the cry of the poor and act with a practical response. During the pandemic its Community Response Service supported those who had lost their jobs or seen a significant reduction in working hours; it provided food vouchers and hampers and its workers collected prescriptions for the elderly who were unable to leave their homes. This winter we have faced a different challenge with the cost-of-living crisis and, once again, Catholic Care has responded with its Christmas Pantries project in schools, supporting over 800 families. This crisis is unlikely to improve for some time and will almost certainly worsen as the winter continues, staying with us long into 2023.

During 2022, Catholic Care cared for and helped over 2,750 people including children in care, adults with a learning disability in danger of getting forgotten by society, older people supported to maintain independence, adults with enduring poor mental health, children and young people in our schools and caring for some of our retired diocesan clergy as they advance in years and frailty.

Catholic Care also works hard in the community, providing help to those in need where there is limited if any funding to support this. Supporting women and their children fleeing from abuse and trafficking, providing a home for destitute asylum seekers and welcoming Syrian refugees to a new home. In fact, the charity supports people with diverse needs from infancy to old age.

The donations raised through this year's Annual Appeal will be used to support various projects run by the charity around food poverty, including community markets and pantries and holiday hunger for children.

As Catholic Christians we believe that *caritas* (charity) is an action of the Church, and, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginningⁱ. Catholic Care needs your help to reach those in need. Without generous donations both financial and in kind, Catholic Care would be unable to reach out to those in need, especially those it reaches through its community work.

As the Bishop of the Diocese and Chair of Trustees for Catholic Care, I ask you to do all that you can to support the Good Shepherd Appeal and to help our vital work of providing loving care to those of our neighbours who are most in need.

On this Laetare Sunday, I assure you of my prayers and every blessing,

+ *Marcus Stock*

✠ Marcus Stock
Bishop of Leeds

Given at Leeds on 15 March 2023, and appointed to be read at celebrations of Mass, published through parish electronic distribution systems and websites, and made available to be taken away from the churches and chapels of the Diocese on the weekend of 18th and 19th March 2023.

ⁱ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* §25

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.* §16 "...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."