



Recently the parish has been through a wonderful exploration of Catholic Social Teaching through the Love in Action programme. From this we have worked towards developing a parish plan which will try to embody the various elements of CST as

well as honouring the Corporal Works of Mercy which we have tried to explore during the Holy Year that Pope Francis called us to. In a nutshell our parish will be taking on four challenges.

The first is to become a founding member of a new campaigning organisation called Harrow Citizens. This will be a branch of UK Citizens.

Citizens UK is the largest and most diverse alliance in the UK of active citizens and leaders from local institutions who are committed to working together for the common good. It is a growing organisation. Currently, there are over 350 local institutions in dues-paying membership.



Community organising starts with the recognition that real change can only come when community rooted organisations pool resources and learn the arts of public action – building enough power to oblige the State and the Market to consider and respond to the real needs of ordinary people whilst also leading the way ourselves on the issues and good practices which are the responsibility of Civil Society.



Citizens UK has trained more than 7,000 community leaders in community organising and leadership techniques and built strong relationships of trust between diverse organisations. Through this training and by putting it into public action, we have given people

the confidence to participate in public life for the good of their communities and the safe and peaceful governance of the City, Borough or Neighbourhood.

The charitable aim of the organisation is to develop the capacity of the citizens of Britain and Ireland to participate more fully in society and to strengthen the member community organisations of civil society in the process.

But Citizens UK is only as strong as the local people who participate and take action together to bring about change. Ideally each member of an alliance includes an identified team of people who have attended Citizens UK training, and are taking action regularly alongside people from other local institutions. In order to encourage more depth in the engagement between member institutions and Citizens UK, each member institution with a turnout of at least five individuals at Assemblies will receive one vote (and each member with a turnout of ten will receive two votes) in the internal democratic decision-making process. Member institutions with less than five individuals will be allowed to participate in debates but not to vote. Members are expected to use their vote(s) in a considered way and to contribute to debate inside the organisation.

Citizens UK members operate within the law and the spirit of the law; to promote equal opportunities, including eliminating discrimination, non-harassment and non-victimisation; to train

and develop leadership; to develop good relations with neighbouring institutions; and to act on our members' interests and concerns.

As members of Harrow Citizens we should be relational in all that we do and stand out as friendly and inclusive in our neighbourhood. We are judged by what we do, not what we say. We should feel responsible for the wellbeing of our local community by reaching out to our neighbours in pursuit of the common good.

**BUILDING COMMUNITY** Secondly, we will try to reach out to members of the parish who may be feeling isolated. For us, this means young mothers who may be at home, far from their family, coping with the new responsibilities of parenthood. Then there are those people who come to our parish from other parts of the world. They too may feel isolated and alone. In some cases their spoken English may not be too good so we will be trying to extend the hand of friendship to them. This will be a self-referral service so that we will be invited by those who need us into their lives.



Care for our planet has been a great theme of the journey that we have made and this is our third priority. With the help of our green fingered parishioners we will be working with our school to re-instate the "Garden of Awe and Wonder" at St John Fisher School. When the time is right the Head Teacher will contact us and we will meet together to plan out what we can do to build the garden so that our children will develop care for the world in which they live.

Our fourth priority is to do something really practical to help those who are less fortunate than us. The idea here is that annually there will be an opportunity to extend the hand of friendship by donating much needed items. This will involve organising the collection of goods and delivering them as well as providing our people with the background to the organisations we are trying the help.

**MARYS MEALS:** This initiative is already in place and early in the new year we are asked to donate our old clothes to Mary's Meals. They sell the cloths and the money that is raised goes towards providing a meal for a school child in a developing country.



**BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT:** We will be asking parishioners to donate toiletries which will be given to the residents of Bakhita house. These are safe houses where women who have been trafficked as domestic and sex slaves are given a place of safety to live. You can imagine some of the horrors that they have been through. Getting a small gift of toiletries would mean the world to them.

**SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE:** Food poverty is one of the scourges of the society in which we live. We will be supporting those Food Banks where there is the greatest need. We have been advised that tinned pies are a really useful item to give to people who need to be fed. So once a year we will be asking parishioner to donate a tinned pie.





**THE TINY TIM APPEAL:** This appeal will take place before Christmas and we will ask parishioners to donate a new toy for a child whose parent is in prison. We will link up with the Prison Advice and Care Trust to help us facilitate this effort.

This new departure for our parish encourages all our people to get involved at a level which is appropriate for them. With this plan we can all contribute, we can all do something to extend the hand of friendship to those who need us.

When he called us to celebrate a Holy Year of Mercy, Pope Francis wrote. "Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church "has an endless desire to show mercy."

Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use.



However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope."

(Misericordiae Vultus 10)

By committing ourselves to working for justice and by setting our parish within the framework of a call to merciful action I believe that we will be awakened to that new life and courage to which the gospel calls us. However, all of this depends on your willingness to be involved which of itself calls us to remember the words spoken by Jesus when he said to his disciples. 'Come, follow me.'

*Fr Shaun Middleton.*

Fr Shaun Middleton, Parish Priest.

