

POVERTY: ENGAGING POLITICIANS

As Catholics, our faith calls us to recognise the dignity of those who are struggling and to respond with a love that is active and outward-looking. Poverty, homelessness, and financial hardship are not distant realities; they are present in our communities, often hidden yet deeply felt. We are called to notice, to draw near, to be respectful and to cross the distances that separate us. Pope Leo XIV, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, reminds us that:

“Christian love breaks down every barrier, brings close those who were distant, unites strangers, and reconciles enemies. It spans chasms that are humanly impossible to bridge, and it penetrates to the most hidden crevices of society.”

With local and national elections approaching, this is an important moment to speak to those who represent us. Democracy works best when people take part and when politicians clearly hear what matters to their communities. You do not need to be an expert. You simply need to care and be willing to ask.

It can be easy to feel that poverty is an overwhelming problem or that individual voices make little difference. Yet across the UK, concern about rising living costs, food insecurity, and housing is widespread. What is often missing is not care, but clarity. When people speak honestly about what they are seeing and experiencing, it helps ensure that these realities are not overlooked and encourages those in leadership to respond.

This is not about endorsing any party or candidate, but about making your voice count. One of the most effective ways to do this is to show that your vote is thoughtful and shaped by the issues that matter to you. You can say, “I want to support someone who will...”, making it clear that these concerns will influence your decision.

Your voice matters, especially when it is rooted in care, dignity, and hope. This is not just political engagement, it is part of our vocation: to stand with the vulnerable, to uphold the dignity of every person, and to act with courage and kindness.

May all who are struggling find support and dignity, may our communities grow in justice and compassion, and may no one be left without hope. Hear us, Lord of life. Amen.



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Why this matters now and who to contact

There is increasing public concern about the pressures facing individuals and families, particularly around the cost of living, access to affordable housing, and the growing reliance on foodbanks. In many places, support services are stretched, and for some, the gap between income and basic needs continues to widen. These are not isolated issues but part of a broader picture of inequality and hardship affecting communities across the country.

Local elections can have low turnout, which means a relatively small number of voices can shape decisions. Local authorities play a key role in responding to these challenges through housing provision, social care, community support, and local welfare initiatives, while national government decisions influence funding, benefits, and the overall economic context.

This creates both a challenge and an opportunity. When people speak clearly about the realities they see and vote with these concerns in mind, it helps ensure these issues are not overlooked. You do not have to raise every issue, only what matters most to you. But when many people ask similar questions and make thoughtful choices, it becomes much harder for these concerns to be ignored, and more likely that meaningful action will follow.

Your local councillor

Responsible for decisions that shape your community daily, including housing, social care, and local welfare provision. Councillors influence how councils respond to issues like rising rents, access to temporary accommodation, support for foodbanks and community services, often where the immediate impact is most visible.

Your MP in the UK Parliament

Responsible for national decisions that affect living standards across the country. This includes welfare and benefits, employment and wage policies, taxation, housing legislation, and public spending. MPs also influence how support is directed to those most in need and how effectively national policy responds to poverty and inequality.



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Engaging candidates and bringing change in your area

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find your representative: You can do this through your local council website or the UK Parliament website.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make contact: Attend a local event or “hustings”. Send a short email to invite candidates to parish events or local community activities. <i>(Find out about local hustings by checking community noticeboards, local library listings, council websites, social media groups and local newspapers or residents associations.)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go prepared and keep it simple: Bring two or three questions at most. You may find it helpful to go with one or two other people and to focus on the issues that matter most to your community.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the meeting: Be respectful and calm. Speak from your values and own experience. Remember, politicians are also people who respond to relationships and to what they hear from their constituents.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up: Send a short thank-you email and repeat your key question or request so it remains clear and can be acted upon.

Helpful topics of conversation that are simple and practical:

You could ask what the candidate will do to support people facing the rising cost of living, such as help with housing costs, access to affordable food or support for those relying on foodbanks. You might ask how they will address homelessness in your area or improve access to secure, affordable housing.

You could also ask about the strength of local services, how they will support community organisations, protect essential services and ensure that people do not fall through the gaps when they are struggling.

From a values perspective, you might ask how their policies will uphold the dignity of those most in need, reduce inequality, and ensure that everyone has access to the basics required for a decent life.

At a national level, it may be appropriate to ask about their approach to welfare and benefits, support for low-income families, and what steps they will take to address poverty in the short and long term. You might also ask what concrete actions they will prioritise in the next year to support those most affected by financial hardship.

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Organising a parish or group meeting

If you would like to take this further, you could invite a local candidate to speak at your parish or attend a community activity. Keeping the gathering small, welcoming, and well organised helps to create a constructive atmosphere.

It can be helpful to prepare a few shared questions in advance and to involve different groups within the parish, such as social justice, youth or SVP (St Vincent de Paul) groups. Working together strengthens the message and shows that these concerns are shared.

It is important to remember that this is not about debate; it is about dialogue. The aim is to build relationships and encourage thoughtful engagement.



Simple actions you can take as a parishioner:

- Pray for our leaders and those in need
- Attend a local meeting or hustings/surgery
- Talk to others in your parish
- Reach out to ecumenical/interfaith circles
- Work with groups like CAFOD or SVP
- Vote with care and conscience
- Join a local community action
- Raise awareness in your Church bulletins
- Volunteer with local outreach services
- Attend a councillor/MP clinic or open office
- Discuss what matters to your community
- Support local foodbanks, offer your skills
- Offer practical support to those in need
- Stay informed, question misinformation
- Live in solidarity with those who have less

Invite a local candidate to your parish for:

- Parish open forum or listening session
- Reflection/prayer on human dignity
- Joint event with neighbouring parishes
- Conversation with Confirmation candidates
- Parish Justice and Peace group meeting
- A round table with local charities
- A listening session with local services
- After Mass tea/coffee gathering
- Meeting with the Parish youth group
- Community meal or shared table
- A 'walk and talk' through the local area to see community needs

(Remember to know what your 'asks' and 'hopes' are and be patient and respectful)

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Speaking with confidence and hope

When speaking with politicians, it is important to go beyond technical language and speak from values. Speaking about the realities people are facing, rather than abstract policy, helps keep the focus on what truly matters. Grounding conversations in dignity, fairness, and the common good can help ensure that those most in need are not overlooked.

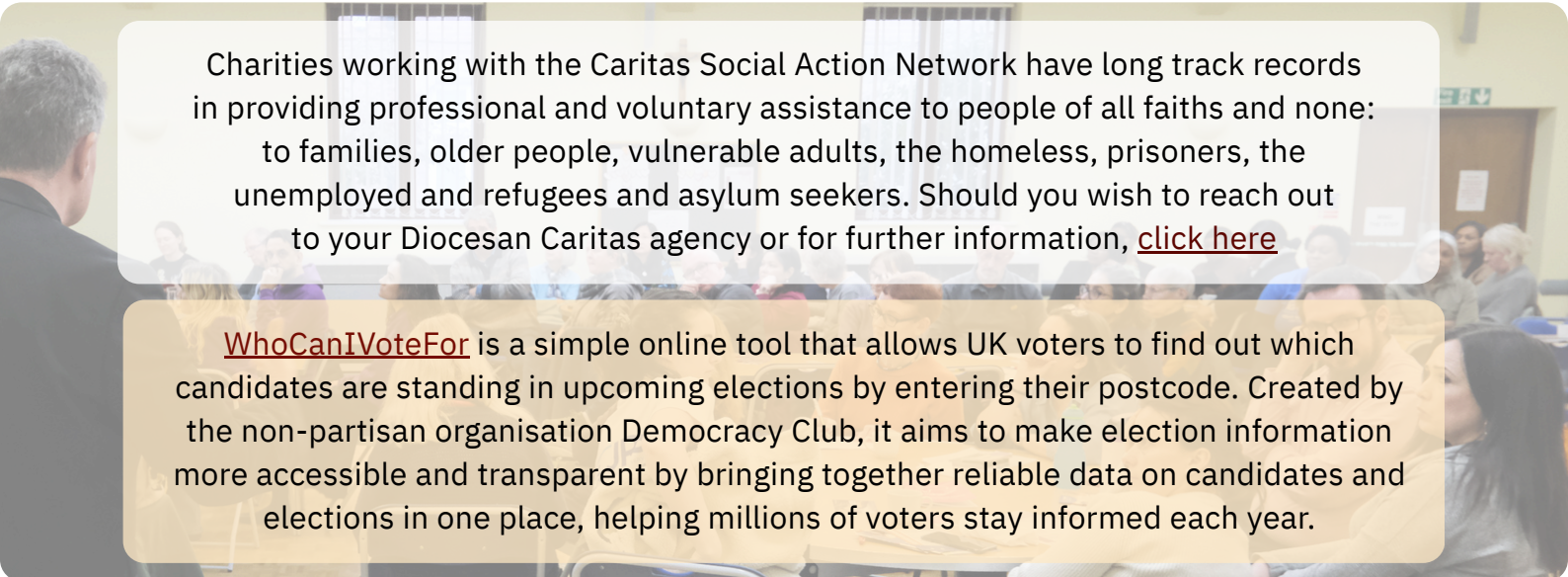
Faith calls us to speak not only with facts, but with hope, imagination, and compassion. In a political environment often dominated by economic concerns, these voices are needed more than ever. Building relationships takes time, so do not be discouraged if progress feels slow. What matters is consistency, honesty, and perseverance.

Spotting misinformation (and responding calmly)

You may hear claims that poverty is inevitable, that people are responsible for their own hardship, or that support systems are being widely misused.

It is important to remember that many of these narratives are oversimplified or misleading. Rising living costs, insecure work, and housing pressures are affecting a wide range of people, including young adults trying to find stable work or afford a place to live. Much of this struggle is not always visible.

A simple, calm response might be to say that, from what you have seen, many people are struggling despite doing their best—especially younger people facing high rents and limited opportunities—and that practical support, such as access to affordable housing, food, and secure income, makes a real difference.



Charities working with the Caritas Social Action Network have long track records in providing professional and voluntary assistance to people of all faiths and none: to families, older people, vulnerable adults, the homeless, prisoners, the unemployed and refugees and asylum seekers. Should you wish to reach out to your Diocesan Caritas agency or for further information, [click here](#)

[WhoCanIVoteFor](#) is a simple online tool that allows UK voters to find out which candidates are standing in upcoming elections by entering their postcode. Created by the non-partisan organisation Democracy Club, it aims to make election information more accessible and transparent by bringing together reliable data on candidates and elections in one place, helping millions of voters stay informed each year.

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Here you can find a selection of organisations that offer practical ways to get involved, support others, and engage with the issues that matter in your community.

- **St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP):** Provides practical, person-to-person support for those in need through local parish groups - <https://svp.org.uk/>
- **Church Action on Poverty:** Campaigns to end poverty in the UK, working with churches and grassroots communities – <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/>
- **Trussell Trust:** Supports a nationwide network of foodbanks and campaigns to end food poverty – <https://www.trussell.org.uk/>
- **National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN):** Catholic network promoting social justice, including action on poverty and inequality – <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/>
- **St John of God Hospitaller Services (SJOG):** Offers care and support for vulnerable people, including those facing homelessness and hardship – <https://sjog.uk/>
- **Acts 435:** Enables individuals to give directly to people in need through local church advocates – <https://www.acts435.org.uk/>
- **Churches Together in England:** Supports collaboration between churches, including joint responses to poverty and local need – <https://cte.org.uk/>
- **National Energy Action (NEA):** Tackles fuel poverty and access to affordable energy – <https://www.nea.org.uk/>
- **Citizens Advice:** Free, confidential advice on housing, debt, benefits, and employment – <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>
- **Warm Welcome Spaces:** Supports local venues offering free, safe, warm places for people during winter – <https://www.warmwelcome.uk/>
- **Crisis:** Offering homelessness support, training, and advocacy – <https://www.crisis.org.uk/>
- **Shelter:** Emergency helpline and online advice on housing – <https://england.shelter.org.uk/>
- **Depaul UK:** Support young people to move on from homelessness - <https://www.depaul.org.uk/>
- **Daughters of Charity Services:** Supports people experiencing homelessness, social isolation, and poverty – <https://www.dcsvpservices.org/>
- **Christians Against Poverty:** Provides debt advice, financial support, and community-based services through local churches – <https://capuk.org/>
- **Emmaus UK:** Provides a home and a package of tailored support – <https://emmaus.org.uk/>
- **Joseph Rowntree Foundation:** Research into UK poverty and inequality – <https://www.jrf.org.uk/>
- **Turn2us:** Information on benefits, grants, and financial support – <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/>
- **CAFOD:** Addressing poverty and injustice both in the UK and globally – <https://cafod.org.uk/>