

Cardinal congratulates new Prime Minister and addresses Cost of Living Crisis

Monday, September 5th, 2022 @ 12:37 pm



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In a statement marking the announcement of a new Prime Minister, Cardinal Vincent Nichols assures PM Liz Truss of his prayerful support and stresses that the needs of the poorest in society must be given urgent attention.

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As President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, I offer my congratulations to Liz Truss on her election as leader of the Conservative Party and her consequent appointment as Prime Minister. I wish to assure the Prime Minister of my prayerful support.

Her appointment comes at a time when many crises have to be faced, at home and across the world. Prominent among them is the crisis in the cost of living.

Catholics are present in every local community, seeking to contribute constantly to the support of those in need. So we are well aware of the dramatic impact this crisis is having, with many people knowing they face choices between 'heating or eating', especially as winter approaches. The affluence to which our society has become accustomed seems to be seeping away.

I, and my fellow bishops, recognise the complexity of the causes, both short and long-term, that bring about the crisis now affecting so many. There are many Catholics in public life and in the charitable sector who are engaging in trying to produce long-term solutions to these political and economic challenges.

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching indicates key principles which help to fashion just solutions to urgent and dire need.

The principle of serving the common good means that the needs of the poorest in society must be given urgent attention. The time for giving priority to factional interests has passed. Today our focus should be on the elderly, families who have the care of children, and all those least able to absorb the huge increases in the cost of living that we face. This means giving immediate attention to issues such as the level of welfare benefits and the impact of the two-child cap on universal credit payments, among other possible actions. Businesses too, especially small businesses, are facing acute challenges and will need help to survive. Their support for employment and family income is crucial.

Similarly, the principle of subsidiarity can be applied to our centralised system of welfare and public services to make delivery more effective and more efficient. This principle, long part of the social teaching of the Catholic Church, seeks "the active participation of private individuals and civil society" through which "it is actually

possible to improve social services and welfare programmes, and at the same time save resources” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 60).

Parishes and Charities

The work of our local parishes, and of Catholic charitable agencies, is based on the firm conviction of the inherent dignity of every person. No one is to be cast aside or ‘discounted’. I am confident that throughout this crisis, the Catholic community will do all we can to act on this conviction and promote this principle.

I know that parishes will continue to do everything possible, including innovative ways of providing further material help and pastoral support. I also urge all Catholics to give whatever time and financial resources they can to charitable endeavours that support those who are affected by the current crisis. The work of Catholic schools, that have long been supportive of, and responsive to, children whose parents might be struggling financially or in other ways, is to be strongly applauded and encouraged.

The spiritual needs of the poor and their special gifts should never be forgotten. As Pope Francis wrote:

“The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith” (*Evangelii Gaudium* – The Joy of the Gospel – 200).

I trust that our parish communities will always be open to those suffering from hardship and in particular need of companionship and spiritual support at this time. They can help us to understand the humility we must have before God.

Finally, I ask that we all offer our prayers for those who are suffering from the cost of living crisis. I pray that all in our society will work together to find ways, both short and long term, to alleviate this crisis which threatens the well-being of so many people.

St. Thomas More, pray for all who serve in political and public life.

St. Bernadette, pray for the poor.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

President, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales