

### **Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff.**

#### **How the Coronavirus has affected the Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff and my particular Parish.**

In order to prepare this report, I have incorporated the experiences and input of His Grace Archbishop George Stack, for an Archdiocesan perspective, my parish representatives of St. Peter's Catholic Church, which chiefly, though not exclusively, serves the local Roath / Splott / Adamsdown / Tremorfa community areas, and one of the key support groups in St. Peter's Parish, the St Vincent De Paul Society (SVP). Although the charity has experienced a dramatic fall in income, parish priests and volunteers continue to respond to the pandemic in remarkable ways. In addition, the significance of the core activity of the Church, from care home sick calls to comforting grieving families, should not be underestimated. These and other initiatives have been supported from grants by Welsh Government, public institutions, private charities and companies as well as church donations. The invaluable contribution of volunteers in cooperation with social services must be recognised.

The Archdiocese of Cardiff's flagship response to COVID-19 (**Staying Together While Apart**) officially closed in December 2020 with the ending of 6-month's Welsh Government Funding of £168,890 (WCVA: Voluntary Service Community Fund). The elements of this have been simply acting as good neighbours – especially to those isolated and alone. The project had two objectives:

- *Maintaining mental health of older/ vulnerable adults:*
  - Parish volunteer teams contacted older/ vulnerable individuals by phone, email, messaging, social media, offering reassurance and comfort while providing moral support to sustain wellbeing.
  - The 'live streaming' of support messages online to connect self-isolating individuals with their traditional community reduced feelings of separation and loneliness and maintained a sense of belonging.
  - Regular audio and audio-visual broadcasts from trusted individuals, known to parishioners and their community, reduced feelings of anxiety and isolation.
- *Providing practical support for older/ vulnerable adults:*
  - Mindful of their physical wellbeing, parish volunteer teams provided food, care packages and prescription deliveries.

The key evaluation finding is the flexibility of parishes to respond, at speed, to changing patterns of need. Initially 'contact work' with those who were isolated took up the majority of priests and volunteer time. Increasingly, however, activity was directed towards providing direct food aid to all age groups as Autumn/Winter approached and personal finances became more challenging.

#### **Centrally Funded Parish Projects**

Responding to the growing need for direct support, three months funding was provided centrally across the Archdiocese of Cardiff to support local projects.

- 25 parish-led projects providing emergency food aid to alleviate the spread of poverty.
- 6 parish-led projects providing crisis support to aid people at risk of poverty.

Funding of £51,760 was raised from the Albert Gubay Charitable Foundation and £71,695 from the National Lottery Community Fund. This work is ongoing. Following initial parish reporting, it appears that 1,521 individuals and 1,086 families at risk of, or in poverty, as a result of Covid-19 have been supported by these 31 individual projects.

#### **Archbishop's Supermarket Voucher Scheme**

In December 2020 the Archdiocese made digital supermarket vouchers available to parishes and schools in the run up to Christmas and beyond. With many of the charity's foodbanks struggling to cope with local demand, the ability to send vouchers electronically proved advantageous. Vouchers can also be posted or given in persons to buy necessities for themselves and their families. By the 15<sup>th</sup> December, a total of £47,670 in digital vouchers for ASDA, TESCO and Morrison had been distributed. A more thorough evaluation of the first round will take place over the coming weeks

before the launch of a second round in late January / early February 2021. In total, the charity intends to distribute *circa* £150,000 in supermarket vouchers.

### **Summary**

While the original goal was to support older people, demand grew to support wider families and children in collaboration with local schools. Alongside food poverty, digital poverty has become an increasingly recognised issue and the charity has responded by providing limited online digital skills training and support. It is clear that local need is not abating. Wales is entering what appears to be another sustained period of lockdown in the depths of winter. Financial support for food aid will persist and grow across all generations. Isolation continues to be a problem and the need for contact and outreach grows.

Understandably, during these times, many Council services have personnel working from home or covering unfamiliar roles. This can lead to, and has led to, confusion including the offering of contradictory advice or information. However, most staff are always courteous and helpful.

Major communication efforts have been made with Live Streaming of Services, Zoom Coffee mornings and individual consultations, telephone calls and email on an organised and structured basis. Many isolated individuals listen to the recorded messages of encouragement on more than one occasion during the day. They tell us they like to hear a comforting, human voice.

Delivery by volunteers of lunches, dinners, food parcels, Food Vouchers, Christmas Hampers, clothes, toys etc., has ensured that individuals and isolated families know they are not alone and may call on our charitable organisation known as the SVP. This is an International, Catholic charity that seeks to support all people of all faiths, or no faith, who may be in need of pastoral, financial and material support, the elderly, the vulnerable, asylum seekers, refugees, serving and ex-offenders, the homeless and those suffering from various addictions.

The SVP at St. Peter's, for example, formed partnerships with other faith groups in the delivering of food, most notably with the Hare Krishna community in Butetown. St. Peter's Parish, along with several other Church communities, were not able to run the annual Night Shelter project this year during the winter period. This project provides individuals with a bed, a safe, warm place to sleep, meals and washing facilities. Representatives of the Parish Night Shelter scheme have a very good working relationship with officers of the Council and there have been several meetings via phone or zoom relating to homelessness issues. The parish is hoping to move on and support the Council and other agencies (e.g. the YMCA) in providing diverse activities for those who, formerly homeless, now find themselves in temporary or even permanent accommodation. This has emerged as a particularly important priority since the Welsh government directed that all councils should provide accommodation for the homeless.

The on-going pandemic has certainly propagated financial and emotional poverty across the whole of the community. However, we have witnessed an unprecedented level of co-operation between all sections of society in an heroic fight-back, whether motivated by notions of civic responsibility, professional integrity, common humanity and /or a desire to live out the values sacred to all Faiths. The Parish SVP and Parishioners, in general, have been in constant communication with Council officials and this can be seen as a very positive sign moving forward.

**Church in Wales**

My experience of how the Coronavirus has affected my particular Parish within the Church in Wales.

The Parish of Glanely covers the Ely Electoral Division. It is a deprived area of Cardiff where families have been on low incomes with many relying on benefits.

The number one impact in our parish has been on mental health. Mental health has been hit very hard in Ely for a number of reasons:

In the many funerals conducted the restrictions of number of mourners was particularly hard for people to bear. In a parish where we typically have several hundred attending funerals, to only be allowed 10, and then 30 mourners was unbearably painful. In some large families not even all of the children of a deceased could attend and families were left to decide which family members could be present. The grieving process is always hard but under these restrictions it was particularly stressful.

Families were not even able to pay their final respects in funeral homes, and all arrangements had to be made over the phone so no meeting with either funeral director or clergy prior to a funeral. Then being ushered into the cemetery with security on the gates counting people in to make sure there were no more than 10, and locking the gates behind us, felt simply terrible.

When the deceased had died in hospital families had been unable to visit them there, which again had a massive impact on mental health of the families. And for patients too, some wondered if they would come out alive and ever see their families again. Ministers of religion were also not able to visit their parishioners but have kept in touch with the hospital chaplain who has been a vital contact with patients.

The suicide rate increased dramatically in Ely. 4 in the first week of lockdown alone! Total suicides now running at 17 since the start of lockdown! All of them were young men, many with pre-existing mental health issues, and others who lost their jobs and went into real despair about the future.

Many workers in Ely did not qualify for the furlough scheme, and those who are self-employed had to wait until June for their support payments to come through – what were they supposed to live on from end of March until June. Poverty became a real issue and still is.

Churches/places of worship being locked had a devastating effect on the mental health of many people.....the lack of understanding (by those in government making decisions) of the importance of Spiritual wellbeing, alongside mental and physical well-being, was clear to see.

The ban on singing has also had a devastating effect on the mental well-being of many people. There are many community choirs which have quite a number of members who joined them precisely because they suffer with depression etc, as well as choirs for those with dementia, and singing is proven scientifically to release endorphins which create a feeling of positive well-being. Also the ban on congregational singing once places of worship were allowed to open has had a huge impact on the way people feel in church. Many have asked the question why the ban on singing, especially in church, when we are all wearing masks anyway? Presumably masks stop transmission of droplets otherwise the government wouldn't be insisting we all wear them?!

Families in over-crowded homes being told to stay indoors has been a recipe for disaster for many with increased abuse behind the closed doors, borne partly out of the frustration of lockdown.

The stress of home-schooling for some families has been very hard to bear. Even more middle-class families, with parents having to work from home, have really struggled. Then there are the families whose parents simply don't care about their child's education, so made no effort whatsoever to engage with the online learning. As in other situations it is the poorest children that will suffer most in the long-term.

## Appendix B - Written submission from Christian Denomination Representatives

Family debt has increased as people have lost their jobs, particularly women who work on zero hours in the non-essential retail trade.

The real fear is that the mental health crisis which this pandemic is still writing will go on possibly for decades to come.....the unresolved grief of those who were not allowed to attend funerals of loved ones.....the loss of self-worth along with loss of work....loss of education for many.....the pain of isolation for those who had to shield for months on end (especially those without social media).

The added stress has been that families have not been able to visit their relatives in care homes. This has been particularly stressful for the family members not being able to see their loved ones but also for residents in the care homes, many suffering with dementia and not knowing why the relatives are not coming to see them. My church has kept in touch with the care homes and our online worship has been relayed on one particular home.

We have seen people who were incredibly resilient and confident completely lose their confidence, some have broken down in tears at how awful the situation is. My Vicar personally would sit in her car after every funeral conducted in the first few months of lockdown (between 5-7 funerals every week) and just cry at the awfulness of the situation, people being denied the possibility to grieve in the normal ways, and being treated almost like criminals by security on the gates of cemeteries if they tried to get in (of course the security staff were also acting out of a position of stress and fear).

The Churches are now allowed to open with procedures to keep people safe, but many there are places of worship where they are still not open. The vulnerable and elderly are still nervous to attend. On-line worship has attempted to keep the church community together and such media apps such as Zoom and WhatsApp has enabled people and groups to meet up virtually. However, there are those who do not have the equipment or knowledge to access these.

On a positive note, we in Ely have seen a great community spirit emerging (as it always does in Ely when times are tough!). People really looking out for their neighbours in many ways. The churches have worked closely with other agencies to set up telephone support etc, as well as weekly collections for the foodbank, shopping for those who were shielding etc.