

How can your parish be involved?

You may have some young people who are already involved in various parish activities through which they show a real faith commitment. The Caritas Award is designed to recognise their faith witness.

It is also designed to help other young people to become more committed to faith and to re-engage with the parish. They need encouragement to become actively involved in parish life..

Some practical steps to take:

- Speak to your local secondary school about the kinds of 'service' which young people could offer in your parish.
- Think about any particular parish needs to which young people might bring their particular energy and talents - working with children, music ministry, liturgy, parish bulletin, website etc.
- Discuss with clergy from local parishes what range of opportunities might be provided across parishes in the deanery.
- Speak to parish groups (eg., SSVP, Legion of Mary etc.) about how they might encourage young people to contribute to their work.
- Consider the capacity of young people to show initiative by organizing events for parishioners.
- In conjunction with the school, organise a parish / deanery meeting for Caritas participants.
- Encourage them to organize and lead a service (e.g., Stations of the Cross) for other parishioners.
- Anticipate approaches from individual young people and be ready to respond to these positively.
- Consider how you might support the spiritual development of these young people in conjunction with the school chaplain.
- Consider appointing a parish co-ordinator for the Caritas Award to liaise with schools, meet with the Caritas Award entrants, monitor their progress, reporting to clergy, parish council etc.
- Consider how you might keep parishioners informed of their progress and seek their prayerful support.



TESTIMONIES

This is part of **Evie's** account of her Caritas experience:

"During my Caritas experience I was provided with opportunities to help, to love and to serve in many different ways. During a visit to a shelter for homeless men, we offered them food and clothes but, most importantly, we practised what our faith teaches us: to love, to respect and to serve everyone, regardless of their circumstances."

Her **parish priest** commented:

"Evie's faith witness has been inspirational and has demonstrated to the wider parish the depth of faith of our young people and their desire to be active about the parish."

Purpose

The Caritas Award was developed to sustain a legacy of the UK Visit of Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. It encourages young people to witness to their faith by engaging in loving service to others in their school and parish communities. It is hoped that it will encourage the sustained engagement of young people in parish communities.

The Caritas Award invites young people to use their faith LEARNING as a starting point for faith PRAYERFUL REFLECTION, leading to actions which show their faith WITNESS.

Recognising that many young people are not active participants in parish communities, the Caritas scheme is designed to appeal to their innate desire to do good for others. By providing stimulating and prayerful Gathering Points to guide their actions, it encourages a return to full participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

Speaking for the Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Philip Tartaglia, has commended the Caritas Award and its potential for parish life:

"Through participating in the Caritas Award young people are helped to understand how their actions of loving concern for others are inspired and supported by their faith in God. Caritas can be a bridge which links the life of faith in school with the adult life of faith in parishes and local communities."



Impact

Since its introduction in 2011, the Caritas Award has been gained by over 2,500 young people who have committed thousands of hours in acts of loving service to others. Critically, they have been helped to deepen their personal relationship with God through shared experiences of prayer and personal reflection, as well as through their extended faith learning. As a result of undertaking the Caritas Award, many have re-engaged with their local parishes and re-committed themselves to prayer and to Mass attendance.

Each entrant for the award has to submit a report which demonstrates

- what faith actions they have completed
- what impact these loving actions have had
- how they have come to learn more about their faith.

These are excerpts from some final submissions:

"After spending time with those who are 'disabled' in some manner but still go through the day with smiles on their faces, I learned that there is love and fulfilment, as well as enjoyment, to be found in the simple things in life. There is no requirement for money, fame or power here, but often a simple conversation or lending an ear can be the key to happiness and joy." - Amy

"I see now how much the Church does to show love. It helps those in need and people who are materially poor. During Advent our parish raised money for children in the Philippines whose lives had been shattered by a typhoon. We collected things for Mary's Meals and raised money for SCIAF. But the Church also helps those who are poor is spirit. It transforms people's lives and brings them to God, as it did with me." - Meghan

"The impact of Caritas experiences on my life has strengthened my faith, thanks to the lessons learned from my teachers and my parish priest. My experience as a PARISH pass-keeper helped me to witness the many people who attend Church, practise their faith and continue to learn about God's love." - Christopher