

Plater Study Group

On behalf of the diocesan Departments for Adult Formation and Justice and Peace, this is a call to gather together a working group of individuals from across the diocese who would be willing to undertake collaborative study in Catholic Social Teaching.

I am a parishioner of Newhouse, Esh Winning, in Durham. Some months back, it was given out in Mass that funding was to be made available across the diocese for anyone interested in studying Catholic social teaching. The purpose was to prepare us as informed parishioners who could best meet with the challenges presented by the huge scale refugee crisis unfolding before us. It was this area which attracted me and prompted me to investigate further.

My enquiries led me to the Virtual Plater, an online project which offers two modules on Catholic Social Teaching; the materials can be used in various ways by parish groups and people studying alone. Although attached to five UK universities, correspondence with the course coordinators made it clear that any parishes with interested individuals would be encouraged to use Plater's online resources to study and complete the course themselves with a view to accreditation being available late 2016 / 17.

I presented this information to the Diocesan Adult Formation Department who then suggested that ideally a group of parishioners from across the diocese, willing to undertake the commitment to study and discussion over approximately 1/1 ½ years, could meet regularly in order to support each other. The goal then would be to bring what knowledge and understanding we had gained back into the parishes in a more user-friendly format for the benefit of the wider group. Again, the aim would be to enrich and arm parishes with an informed response to those challenges pertaining to the refugee crisis or any other social issues concerning justice and peace.

So, the primary purpose of this letter today is to reach out to any interested individuals who might be willing to undertake it and meet regularly for discussions. Secondly, to inform those among us who might not have either the inclination or time to commit to such a course but who, nevertheless, are interested in finding out more about Catholic teaching around the social issues of our times, and who would like to be involved in learning about these from those of us who undertake the full course.

So, what is the course content? What are the time demands?

Course content

What is now generally meant by Catholic Social Teaching amounts to a series of publications which together form the modern view i.e. beginning in 1891, when Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical called *rerum novarum*. Most of the documents that form the Church's official Social Teaching are encyclicals, written by popes over the last century. Although substantial reading is involved, they are introduced in ways that make reading them easier than at first appears. The primary texts of CST are a difficult set of documents, but this module gives you

an easy way into them. Ideas looked at include the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity and the role of government and, last but not least, solidarity and the preferential option for the poor. All of CST is grounded in writings from both the Old and New Testaments.

The course assumes no prior knowledge of Catholic Social Teaching. Also, guidance and direction in reading and interpreting the encyclicals is given throughout.

The purpose is to study online independently but with a support network of other individuals who could meet regularly, say once a month, for discussion of what has been covered.

Time demands

Timewise, there are 2 modules, each with 8 units. Each unit takes 20 hours so, over two modules, 320 hours in total. Studying part time, this would constitute a year working at approx. 6 to 7 hours per week, including time spent in discussion. However, this is open for negotiation.

I myself am semi-retired and, so, have time on my hands to get involved in something I feel passionately about, i.e. social justice, in particular, those issues relating to the refugee crisis. These include addressing the many injustices and degradations that refugees face as they attempt to integrate in new societies which -- more often than not -- are Christian societies. And, not least of all, are those issues which potentially challenge the security and safety of our societies as two very different cultures begin the task of learning to integrate, to live harmoniously side by side.

Addressing what he called the "globalization of indifference" Pope Francis rang in the New Year with the following words: "Sometimes we ask ourselves how it is possible that human injustice persists unabated, and that the arrogance of the powerful continues to demean the weak, relegating them to the most squalid outskirts of our world".

The Holy Father then called every Catholic to form part of 'an ocean of mercy'. He said: "All of us are called to immerse ourselves in this ocean . . . to overcome the indifference which blocks solidarity, and to leave behind the false neutrality which prevents sharing."

Anyone interested in this course, or in finding out more without committing to it, can contact me directly on email maryalichelouise@outlook.com or further details are available from Fr McCoy.

Thank you for listening.

Louise Harrison.