

CARITAS IN ACTION



We saw great community spirit during lockdown and we don't want to lose it

Jenny Sinclair

As we begin to emerge from lockdown, what have we learned? Underlying weaknesses in society have undeniably been laid bare by the pandemic. The undervalued status of our key workers and carers, whilst hailed as heroes, was exposed. The Church has found itself reduced, we are ill-equipped to deal with grief, businesses have failed, redundancies are widespread and everyone is uneasy. Virtually every aspect of the economy is on life support. Discussion abounds on the lessons to be drawn and things will not be the same again. Some lessons it seems had to be learned the hard way.

Yet have you, like us, been touched by the remarkable sense of community spirit that emerged during lockdown? New connections and interactions between different branches of the community have been sprouting: from community WhatsApp groups, to local police working with foodbanks and pharmacies, from neighbours delivering supplies to the shielding, from school science departments donating PPE to hospitals and care homes, to that smile you gave to the supermarket cashier or to your neighbour as you clapped across the street on a Thursday night.

When looking at how to rebuild stronger for the future, it is just as important to draw on the energy from these positive experiences that emerged from the crisis – the glimmers of new connections and human kindness – as to learn from the failures and the suffering.

That's why we at Together for the Common Good, keen to galvanise and not lose these new relationships, have created a new Guide *Let's Continue to Build Community*. As the fallout of the pandemic hits, it's for people who want to move forward together and continue to build on

that community spirit to strengthen their neighbourhoods.

The economic, social and health consequences of the crisis are only starting to unfold and will impact us all in some way. The power that comes from community grassroots, and the love, strength and support it provides, will be more important than ever.

The Guide consists of four, 45 minute sessions to use with a group. It is easy to download, and will give you a focus to bring people together to continue to build on connections forged during lockdown. It also helps you create a simple action plan to take forward in your neighbourhood.

The sessions provide the perfect structure for an open discussion on what really matters in your community. You could invite your neighbours, fellow volunteers, key workers, faith leaders, community leaders, local authority representatives and others who've been helpful, or been helped, during lockdown. Everyone has an equal voice and shares their views and together you identify what you will do next.

The four conversations are framed around Common Good principles, which (like all our resources) are derived from Catholic Social Teaching but it is deliberately framed in neutral, non-religious, non-lecturing language. So the material is suitable for everyone in the community, irrespective of background, class, faith tradition or political views. Woven throughout the sessions are principles such as 'solidarity', 'human equality', 'dignity in work', 'stewardship' and 'interdependence', all themes so pertinent in the pandemic.

The Guide is both detailed and straightforward, with the necessary resources, questions, prompts and reflections all provided. Leadership can be shared so one person doesn't have to do it all. The sessions can be held online if that suits your

group best. The Guide is free to download at <https://bit.ly/LetsContinueToBuildCommunity>.

Even though access to our churches is currently constrained, our mission as Catholics and Christians is all the more needed. The limitations we are living with cannot stop us building the relational power that flows from being a good neighbour. They cannot prevent us from pursuing the Common Good – the shared life of the community in which everyone can flourish, each of us taking responsibility according to gifts and ability. Our calling as followers of Jesus Christ is to be witnesses to the flourishing of love in faithful human relationships.

If you like the idea of the community sessions but would also like to pursue the themes in a prayerful way with Scripture in your prayer group or a church setting, then you might like *The Word and the Common Good* another of our resources consisting of six sessions. You can also download it for free at: <https://bit.ly/WordandCommonGood>.

We hope that you, like us, want to keep the flame of community spirit alive as we learn to live with coronavirus and face the future together. The people of the Church have an important contribution to make. It will be through community-led action, harnessing the distinct gifts and experiences that each of us has to offer, that we can truly rebuild a stronger, better society than the one we left behind.

■ Please visit: www.togetherforthecommongood.co.uk for more information.

■ Jenny Sinclair is the founder director for Together for the Common Good, a member of CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network), the Church's social action agency in England and Wales. www.csan.org.uk

Ellis Heasley

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

At least eighty killed in southern Kaduna attacks in July alone

On 24th July, ten people were killed, and at least 11 others were injured, in an attack by Fulani militia on Zikpak, in Jema'a Local Government Area (LGA), southern Kaduna State. The attack marked the latest in a sustained campaign of violence targeting farming communities in southern Kaduna which has been ongoing since January 2020, and which has seen a particular surge in July, with at least 80 people killed in the last month alone.

Particularly striking regarding the attack on Zikpak is the fact that local sources report security agents arrived the scene well after the assailants had left, even though the village is less than two kilometres away from a local military base. The spokesman for Nigeria's president recently gave assurances of comprehensive security coverage in southern Kaduna. Indeed, at least 18 security agencies are based in the area. However, there is little evidence of vulnerable communities such as these receiving the protection they require.

According to the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety), 300 southern Kaduna Christians had been killed in militia attacks in the 200-day period from 1st January to 20th July. Few, if any, perpetrators of these attacks have been intercepted or brought to justice, and neither a Covid-19 lockdown nor a 24-hour curfew which has been in place in some LGAs since 11th June have inhibited perpetrators from attacking seemingly at will.

Thousands have been forcibly displaced by the violence, with many now residing in emergency IDP camps. Earlier in July 1,013 people, including 11 pregnant women, were forced to flee their homes following a series of attacks from 10th-12th July. They are currently sheltering in an emergency camp at an Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA)

educational facility in Zangon Kataf LGA.

Calls for international action are growing increasingly more pronounced, both from within Nigeria and internationally. On 23rd July, hundreds of women participated in a protest in Zangon Kataf LGA against the continuing violence, while youth from the area protested peacefully in the federal capital, Abuja.

As previously reported in this column, the UK All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief recently published a report on the violence which raised serious concerns that the current situation may amount to genocide. These concerns were reiterated in a televised interview with the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Most Revd Justin Welby in Zaria on 24th July, in which he described the campaign of violence as "genocide," and attributed a perceived lack of concern on the part of the international community in general, and the United Nations in particular, to the fact that the area is "almost 99 per cent" Christian.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has also repeatedly called on the United Nations Human Rights Council to convene a special session on the human rights situation in central Nigeria, with a particular focus on the southern Kaduna area and neighbouring Plateau State. No such session has been convened thus far.

Please pray for all victims of violence in central Nigeria, ask God to protect the vulnerable, heal the injured, shelter the homeless, and comfort those who have lost loved ones. Pray particularly that the international community would take swift action to respond to the violence, holding the Nigerian government to account for its failure to protect vulnerable citizens, and assisting the authorities in addressing the threat posed by Fulani militia wherever possible.