

IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

The Common Good and Our Calling

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To hear a recording, click [here](#)

Hello everyone. It's great to be here.

Before we get started, let me tell you a bit about the shape of this morning. The session will consist of a mixture of short talks from me, times for discussion, a break, and some moments of quiet, and we'll finish with a prayer. I'll start by sharing a bit of my story and tell you about my work with Together for the Common Good, then we'll read the signs of the times, look at some of the challenges and opportunities facing us in the new era, and we'll explore our calling - what it means to be God's people in these times of unravelling.

Introduction

So let me start by giving you a brief picture of who I am and a bit of background about Together for the Common Good. We are a small independent, non-partisan UK charity dedicated to civic and spiritual renewal. We work across the churches, and we draw particularly on the theological tradition of Catholic Social Thought to help the churches reimagine their vocation to be a blessing on society at a time of profound change and instability.

We work in practical ways by resourcing local churches, leaders, Christian organisations, young people and schools, by producing resources, creating platforms for thought leadership and through public conversations.

Let me tell you how this started. I grew up in an Anglican clergy family. My father was a bishop. My father, David Sheppard, became the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool and his 22 year partnership with the Catholic Archbishop Worlock became a ground-breaking, interconfessional civic friendship that blessed a troubled city. They overcame the historic rupture of sectarianism and became community leaders at a time of instability and division. But I was a rebel and was estranged from the Church.

From my teens to my mid-twenties I was quite lost. Then unexpectedly, I had a conversion experience. And quite against my expectations, I was called into the Catholic Church.

For the next 23 years I lived a quiet life, developed a prayer life, raising my children and working in graphic design and unremarkable jobs.

Then in my late forties - in 2011 - I experienced a calling of the Holy Spirit on my life. I was prompted to sense the early signs of the new era, of the social, economic and cultural unravelling we are now seeing. I was seeing communities abandoned, the undermining of democracy, the risk of social unrest. I had questions about the state of the Church in the UK and its capacity to make an effective Christian response - it had lost confidence and needed help.

I felt God was asking me to re-examine the partnership between my father and Archbishop Worlock, to find out what the church could learn from that partnership for this new time.

People joined me and Together for the Common Good emerged. We focused on the vocation of the Church in our country - we asked what is God's mission for our time - how are we called to act?

We examined the inheritance of the Church in England and lessons to be learned. We saw the potential of the People of God as catalysts for spiritual and civic renewal.

Catholic Social Thought

Along the way, I discovered the tradition of Catholic Social Thought. This is a body of thinking, essentially a series of long and detailed theological documents rooted in the gospel and in natural law, each responding to the social questions of the times - intended as a gift to all people of goodwill. It is emphatically not intended to be a theocracy, but instead guidance for good judgement.

The first was published in 1891 as a response to the impact of industrial revolution - it saw how families and communities were impacted by the interests of big capital at the time. Since then subsequent documents have offered detailed theological practical guidance on everything from the family, to migration, climate change, war, the dignity of work, social peace, vocation, bioethics, the economy and much more.

This is a justice tradition that is always attuned to what is happening to the human person, the natural world, it asks what is happening to relationships, families, communities, to the particularity of place. Because this is God's primary concern.

We found that this tradition offers a coherent framework that can seed and support the people of the Churches to work for spiritual and civic renewal, at all levels from the grassroots to questions of statecraft.

Common Good Thinking Principles

It's not well communicated though so we worked to make its principles more accessible. We call this "common good thinking" and we have worked to explain it ways that people can understand - a common good vocabulary.

We also recognised the need to build an alliance, especially of Christians, to engage around this narrative.

This language needs to be integrated into our understanding of evangelisation - indeed we'd say that evangelisation is incomplete if lacks a politically literate gospel rooted analysis of what's going on in the world around us. Catholic social thought enables us to see what's going on in a way that is aligned with our faith.

Our experience teaches us that the Church needs to

- become outward facing, to rebuild solidarity with poor communities
- correct mission drift, to promote Justice in its authentic Christian form
- become a relational church - at all levels - personal, family, local, regional, national and international - from the character of the local church to matters of statecraft - we'll come back to that
- build a strong alliance across the churches with our brothers and sisters in Christ and with others of goodwill - despite doctrinal differences - often we find agreement in areas of political economy.
- build an alliance committed to upholding the sacred, to uphold the human space, to restore the language of mutual obligation and reciprocity
- to assert a constructive alternative worldview to challenge the current state of affairs

The work of Together for the Common Good

Our work speaks to the heart of these issues. Our work focuses on engaging Christian leaders across the churches, para church organisations and charities who are asking questions about how the church should respond to this period of profound change, to the political moment, to poverty, community cohesion - and the implications for ministry.

We do this through workshops, [sessions and talks](#) like this, helping leaders discern their way forward in their communities. We accompany local church leaders to help them discern their vocation for the common good in the neighbourhood, encouraging them to create a sense of family and civic relationships with neighbouring institutions.

We also do it by informing and equipping leaders across the churches through [public lectures and webinars](#), looking at public issues through the frame of Catholic social thought - like work, economy, civic participation, the family, migration, people and planet, housing, the new ideologies, social peace, what it means to be human and much more.

We invite audiences of Christian leaders across denominations, to come together to listen to leading thinkers addressing live issues - and together these leaders learn through deliberation, grow their confidence and build relationships between them. We help leaders of Christian organisations remember their tradition and correct mission drift.

We create resources to be used on the ground. We produce a website full of resources, stories, essays, we share our talks, recordings, videos.

We teach in a relational way - through conversation, partnership, and by accompanying leaders in private conversations, including young leaders.

Another way we serve the people of the churches is through a transatlantic podcast [Leaving Egypt](#) - addressing what it means to be God's people in times of unravelling - our listeners are leaders from across the churches, from the UK and North America and beyond. We explore the causes of our cultural and social upheaval as well as stories of how the Holy Spirit is at work at the grassroots.

We also help to form young people in common good thinking through a [programme for schools](#) consisting of lessons, assemblies and community engagement for 11-16 year olds. We train teachers to deliver, helping them position the school as a force for the common good in the neighbourhood, helping the young people see the importance of responsibility, relationships and reciprocity.

So that's a snapshot of our work. For the last thirteen years Together for the Common Good has been on a creative, spirit-led journey where several integrated strands have emerged, each resourcing the other. Thousands of people have been involved yet we are small and agile enough to experiment in ways that perhaps the institutional church can't.

This is important work but difficult to fund, so we need help. We are a small highly efficient charity on a shoestring. We always work in partnership, which helps us punch above our weight, and there are many associates working pro bono alongside our small core team. We are part of a coalition of like-minded organisations and leaders, operating as a creative minority.

So now you know who I am and a bit about my organisation, let's pause for a moment before we move onto asking the question about these uncertain times, "what's going on?"

SESSION 1

Uncertain Times

So to start with, we're going to look at what's going on - and bear with me, we need to know what has gone wrong before we can discern our response.

So the framework of Catholic social thought causes us to ask questions about our political economy - that is, the arrangements that affect our daily lives, like wages, the way money is regarded, the state of the world of work and so on. It requires us to identify where any system is dehumanising, whether it is a system that privileges quick profit over dignity, or whether it centralises power through the impersonal state.

So this tradition calls us to change and reform systems that degrade the human being. Not by imposition, by the democratic process. Not by the Church having power, but through the laity.

We are to work for an economy founded on the humane treatment of workers and the dignity of work.

So what do we see? What are the most obvious symptoms around us? We see that young people can't afford a home, that the rates of marriage are declining, that social trust is breaking down. We see what Pope Francis calls a "Malign culture" - individualism, ideology, indifference, lack of meaning.

People talk about the "cost of living crisis" but it isn't just isolated to the UK and isn't just a post pandemic phenomenon. It is just one example of a wider crisis unfolding across the West. Its causes didn't start ten years ago, they go back much further.

We need to zoom right out and see the bigger picture

It's not obvious. Catholic social thought can help us.

Why do we need to do this? Because if we misunderstand what is going on, we can inadvertently prop up an unjust system, running the very real risk of becoming what Lenin called "the useful idiots" if we make the wrong call.

Many of the assumptions we might carry - political, social - may be out of date. We are in a time of seismic change.

This is a time of intense political confusion - there are competing ideologies at work - so it is vital to ensure we are looking at this through a Christian worldview.

Just over 8 years ago, Pope Francis said we are not entering an era of change but *a change of era*.

Every era is characterised by a particular philosophy and that philosophy shapes the "political economy" - these things are always shaped by ideas.

So the animating idea of the current era that is breaking down, comes from the philosophy of liberalism. This manifests in various forms - and some of it has been very positive - but in the last 45 years or so it has morphed into an ideology known as neoliberalism.

Further back its roots are in the Enlightenment but it manifested in 1979 in the form of neoclassical economics which prioritises shareholder interest and the pursuit of profit maximisation over everything else. This involved removing the constraints from finance capital which ushered in four decades of transactional individualism and the system of globalisation across the West. We can describe this as the era of contract.

The type of economic model that this philosophy generates is inherently unstable because it is founded upon a false anthropology - a desiccated, soulless conception of the human being and a false idea of freedom, quite different from a Christian anthropology where human beings are seen as transcendent, relational beings, made in the image of God.

When finance capital dominates it has a tendency to dehumanise and commodify human beings and the natural world. It does generate wealth of course, but it tends to exploit and requires units of labour (that's us, human beings) to be cheap and mobile. This financialisation is profoundly affecting people's lives.

In its extreme form, this philosophy conceptualises family as a constraint, and tradition, accountability and mutual obligation are seen as obstacles to progress, relationship to place is reframed as old fashioned.

The insistence on having to move to find work used to be seen as right wing but is now rebranded as "freedom". This transactional "freedom" brought prosperity for some but it broke parts of our country. Investment moved out of certain areas and this caused civic and spiritual degradation. It drew the brightest and the best away from their places of belonging to the big cities. This was in fact a politics of abandonment. It was a breach of the common good.

Governments of all parties over the last four decades have perpetuated this system. None have had the political vision to challenge the power of finance capital.

After three decades of no sign of reform of this economic system, the so-called "left behind" had enough of this liberal domination and mismanagement. They literally had nothing to lose. Their reaction was framed by big money interests as "populist" but in previous eras it would have been understood as a peasants' revolt.

But this philosophy generates not only economic but social consequences. Liberalism incorporates the idea of "the unencumbered self", which produces a culture of self, emphasising rights over responsibilities, which is effectively *an assault on relationship* - for example we are encouraged to outsource more and more the things we used to do as communities - child care, care of the elderly - generating conditions that lead to pathologies such as family breakdown, atomisation, the fragmentation of communities, spiritual confusion.

This hyper liberal philosophy generates a false idea of freedom.

It is based on a false anthropology, where God is subordinated to culture of self

Every country that has followed this system is seeing the same effects. The motivation of this spirit is anti-human which is why the system is now unravelling. As the old era is dying, we see multiple morbid symptoms.

We can see this unravelling in multiple sectors which often are regarded as disconnected but in fact stem from the same source. We see it in low productivity, low wage high welfare economies, in extreme inequality, in massive public and private debt. We see it in the collapse of trust in institutions, in the disconnect between the managerial class and the governed, in the weakening of democracy, the subordination of the local by digital culture, in degraded local infrastructure, in the atrophy of local forms of human association.

We see it in climate warming and the displacing of communities, we see it in the liberalising of abortion and euthanasia, in the commercialisation of surrogacy, the promotion of conditions needing lifetime medications, in the normalising of cosmetic surgery, in organ harvesting, sexual exploitation, human trafficking. We see it in the erosion of social trust, in social fragmentation, in culture wars, in the emergence of political extremes on the right and the left.

And not least, we see it in symptoms of human distress - like rises in loneliness (in fact more prevalent among the young than the old), in rises in addiction, self-harm, depression and nihilism, in the tyranny of social media culture which sells a false idea of freedom and self-actualisation through a competitive and dehumanising matrix of likes and image manipulation.

This is what Francis means by "malign culture". He stresses that the younger generation are the most vulnerable to the cultural changes taking place. He says this culture is not sensitive to the needs of the poor reducing them to numbers. He says it is focused on the avoidance of suffering, the exaltation of physical qualities, and he says that virtual reality is taking over real life, eclipsing real local culture. He is very concerned that this

- makes young people think they are losers
- causes frustration and suicide
- introduces illusions about the meaning of life
- that causes indifference to the realities of the poor
- Indifference/individualism that undermines common good
- that promotes individualistic physical perfection
- young people need help to overcome the dangers of ideology

There is a vicious cycle at work here that connects the economic and the social

- the dominance of banking profit promotes intensified consumerism and low wages >>
- which in turn generate social pathologies >>

- which in turn lead to more welfare expenditure >>
- which in turn requires more state redistribution >>
- which then leads to more consumerism >>
- which leads to more pathologies and so on.

So as this is playing out, we are seeing a collaboration between the powers of finance capital and the technocratic state, which when they become too powerful and when they are unconstrained, are effectively what we would conceive of as the "principalities and powers."

For shorthand we can call this way of seeing the world "individualism", where the primacy of God is subordinated to the primacy of self. It generates poverty in all its forms: economic poverty, relational poverty and spiritual poverty, leading to the breakdown of morality. It also generates the cult of identitarian politics with its culture of self in the form of victimhood, the battle of rights which have led to the culture wars.

In simple terms, this individualistic philosophy is hostile to human beings who are social beings, it generates "poverty" in two significant ways:

- in economic terms it generates low wages requiring a bigger and bigger welfare state which ends up subsidising business which pays wages too low to live on
- and in social terms, it generates pathologies that the State ends up having to solve.

Anti-human system generates poverty in a toxic cycle:

- Economic: job insecurity and low wages increase public subsidy and debt
- Social: assault on relationship causes problems that the State cannot solve

The common good is undermined by the domination of capital and technocratic state.

A malign culture

Now the era of globalisation is coming undone. The Russia-Ukraine war exposed its inherent instability and destabilised its power base. Disturbance to precarious global supply chains caused inflation, and increasingly non-western countries are forming new alliances, rejecting western hubris. The old era is giving way to a new world order, whose character unknown, but we can already see authoritarian, technocratic and less democratic philosophies taking hold.

Catholic social thought not only helps us see the problems it also helps us articulate solutions. It looks for a balance of power where the human being is not dominated - it requires powers of money and state to be constrained - through for example the tax system, through strong countervailing civil society institutions (such as unions, churches, associations and local business), and through the deconcentrating of capital (for example shifting from six big, centralised banks to many regional banks) and through distributed power (renewing democratic processes at regional and local levels).

Not least it calls us to act in countercultural ways as we will discuss later. It calls us to face this era with a sense of tragic realism and recognise the importance of the local, of fraternity, friendship and solidarity.

DISCUSSION

What struck you? How do you think all these things are connected?

[Refreshment Break]

So before the break we heard about hyper liberalism - that is sometimes understood as the unencumbered self, the removal of all constraint, and which manifests in identity politics and the breakdown of trust - can you see how it manifests on the left in social terms - say, how the family is being undermined - and on the right in economic terms - how capital is being given a free pass?

SESSION 2

Our Calling

So let's now turn our attention from reading the signs of the times to our calling as Christians. What are the implications and opportunities for us, for our churches, for our institutions, national and regional, for businesses?

This is a period of unprecedented change, throughout the West and globally. In many senses, our age is an age of crisis, not least in terms of climate and relations between nations.

To put this in ecclesial terms, it is true to say that Christendom is finished. There is a book, *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*, written by James Shea in 2020. He says "We are at the end of Christendom" and he defines Christendom as "economic, political, social life as inspired by Christian principles. That has been what we've lived with for centuries, and it's over. We still enjoy many of these principles in the form of its legacy. It's been described as a cut flower - if the roots are no longer nourished, the flower will continue blooming for a while but eventually it will wilt and die.

Christendom may be over and we are seeing the beginnings of cultural and covenantal breakdown. A decaying culture scarred by individualism and identitarian ideologies, by social and economic dysfunction. There is a vacuum where political leadership ought to be. There is great uncertainty about the future.

But we are not gloomy, certainly not despondent.

These are great and wonderful days to be alive.

Because we know, amidst this crisis, that God is at work.

This is a time when as God's people we find ourselves in increasing opposition to the world yet called to live abundantly within it. This position of opposition can and should be a joyous opportunity to do as Jesus did, to participate in God's great creative participation, in the way we live. So what is the Church's mission here? What is an authentically Christian response going to look like?

There are opportunities to be a blessing on our culture, to bring to life again the infant Church described in the Acts of the Apostles. There are roles for God's people to play in spiritual and civic renewal. We have a story more compelling than individual autonomy, more meaningful than power and wealth, more beautiful than the cult of self. All around us are people desperate for meaning, and our tradition has an answer: a story of justice, truth, beauty and communion. A story that gives us the authority to reject the temptations of power in inhuman systems, the dull compulsion of markets and the commodification of human beings and the natural world.

There is a work to be done. This work is about restoring community, about solidarity with poor communities, about defining and defending the place of the family in society, about protecting the innocence of children, about standing up for humanity, preserving the human space, defending the sacred, it is also about good business practices, about just and covenantal relationships, about trust, responsibility, mutual obligation and belonging, about what it means to be human.

At the level of statecraft, we're called to propose a political economy¹ consistent with our tradition. That means decentralising banks and energy providers. It means the dignity of work - insisting on work, we must not capitulate to a workless future. It means investment for jobs and skills training in the abandoned places. It means distributing power and assets. It means enabling that thick layer of healthy civil society institutions which can resist the dominance of capital and state power. It means building a common good between capital and labour, between finance and production.

To do this work, we must reject the false promises of both collectivism and individualism, the divisiveness of identity politics and the corruption of neoliberalism. We do this by building common good - the antidote to individualism.

We start, whatever situation we are in, by seeking first the kingdom of God. Whether in a business environment, a school or a church.

This means living God's economy and cultivating relationships of loving friendship with our neighbours, building common good across class, opinion, race, sex, age and educational background. We are called to be prophetic, countercultural, to resist structures of sin and to build structures of grace.

So before we go into small groups, let's look at some of the challenges and opportunities before us.

¹ See <https://togetherforthecommongood.co.uk/news/lincoln-lecture-series>

Challenges facing the Church

The greatest challenge to the Church is always the challenge to faithfulness and steadfastness in belief. With this comes the temptation for the Church to look to the world and to imitate the world, rather than provide a witness as prophetic leaven in the world. The Church has always been tempted by the zeitgeist and it's no different today.

Let's remember that although many of the churches are declining there is also growth. And globally the numbers continue to rise, Pentecostal numbers and Catholic numbers are growing overall. But those figures don't represent growth across every nation. While there are also pockets of growth, there is a picture of decline and collapse in historically Christian countries. Christendom is dead.

Because of that there is something of transition about where we are as a Church. There are efforts to push the church into the private domain out of the public square. There is amalgamation and closure of churches, the loss of a Christian presence in places. The loss of sacred space, the loss of relationship with place, the place on the map.

We are seeing loss of confidence, poor formation and mission drift, confusion and disagreements around how to be church, including divisions within the churches about what evangelisation means, whether it means proclaiming the Gospel or living the Gospel. It's not either or. It has to be both. But these confusions take their toll.

The Antidote

But the big questions about life have not gone away, in fact they are intensifying. People are desperate for a life of meaning. And our faith has answers to these questions. There is a need for a Church that speaks into our culture - that is seen to be a blessing on our culture, that brings to life the Acts of the Apostles. Our Christian tradition has a narrative for society much more desirable and necessary than power and wealth, than the purposeless cult of self.

There are vital roles for the church to play in spiritual and civic renewal, to challenge the failed models of both individualism and collectivism. There are roles at every level:

Opportunities for Christians at national and regional levels

There are opportunities to speak about the significance and the importance of human existence and not to be shy to talk about our God given identity; to counter the identity politics that divides human beings, that removes our transcendent nature, that makes us vulnerable to domination, that undermines the common good.

We have the language of the sacred. A language that upholds what it means to be human from natural conception to natural death. What it means to care for each other, what it means to assert that we are relational beings, not isolated individuals.

This calls us to speak the language of covenant, of relationship, solidarity, of mutuality, the language of mutual responsibility. and to build back relationship where it has been lost, to build strategic relationships between institutions. To talk about what it means to have just and binding relationships with mutual interdependence. Where the tyranny of overcentralised wealth, power, or government is seen as an affront to creation, and is called out as such.

There are opportunities to promote the notion of the common good - where human relationships are central: There are opportunities to be prophetic, to be countercultural, to resist structures of sin, to build structures of virtue. There are opportunities to offer an antidote.

What is needed is a common good narrative of hope and justice that resists the dull and dehumanising compulsion of markets, the commodification of creation, and welfare systems that seek to remove, isolate and undermine human relationships.

Opportunities for Christians in commercial, business or public institutions

Christian business leaders can call out inhumane systems of profit and power that lead to the abandonment of human beings, whether it's insisting on relationship in commerce, like being served by a human being rather than using the self-checkout, or whether it's making a virtue out of local face to face commerce, or rehumanising bureaucratic processes by building in human connection.

Business leaders can generate a vocabulary about the common good, about mutuality, about virtuous places of encounter, of dialogue, of relationship. They can foster virtuous agency and promote, in the widest sense, vocation - genuine calling, not simply career.

In terms of challenge, there is massive mission drift in Christian institutions, in terms of identity and purpose. This is also an opportunity. We need to be serious about our institutions as places where prayer happens, where being a visible Christian is acceptable.

And in the wider virtuous reality, Christian institutions and businesses can build coalitions and alliances with like-minded institutions and other religious organisations, and reorientate institutions towards spiritual and civic renewal.

So there are opportunities in commercial, business or public institutional life. For the moment we're going to look at these. After the break we'll look at opportunities at a more personal and local level.

DISCUSSION

Where do you notice, in commercial, business or public institutions, life becoming less relational? and where, as Christians, can you influence a more relational, rehumanising, way of doing things?

Time Of Silence

Let's have a moment of silence with this passage from Jeremiah, and now, contemplate what the opportunities to become more relational might be for us personally, in terms of leadership, and locally, terms of our churches, schools, and local Christian groups?

But seek the peace of the city
where I have sent you into exile
and pray to the Lord on its behalf
for in its peace you will find your peace

Jeremiah 29.7

SESSION 3

Opportunities for Christians at local level

So we can see how Jeremiah sets this out.

He describes what it might mean to be God's people in this time of unravelling.

So what does this mean for us today - in the local, in our churches, our schools, our local groups, for us as leaders?

It's about building common good, a shared life, friendship with God and with each other.

We need local leaders who put personal spirituality and vocational responsibility at the service of the common good. We need to nurture leaders who are humble, who understand the Beatitudes. Who understand that the places where people work and live are as important as the work they do and how they live. Leaders who see the face of Christ in their neighbour, who are attuned to discovering the sacred in the ordinary, who can assert a Christian identity fundamentally rooted in God and the Gospel. An identity that is relational, which prioritises the building of local relationships of trust and reciprocity.

We need our churches, schools and other Christian groups to become more intentionally relational, through building local partnerships, by committing to the life of local neighbourhoods, in ways that strengthen our local civic ecology.

At local level, we, our churches, schools and Christian groups need to learn to live in solidarity with the poorest in our communities. Not as service providers serving clients, not as rescuers helping victims, but as neighbours and friends in reciprocity and in mutual respect. Jesus said, "I have called you friends." At the heart of this we are to become more intentional about rediscovering the practice of friendship.

The Good Samaritan did not walk by on the other side. He didn't leave it to others to deal with. I think in our own time this means not to outsource this to the council, or to the state. The Samaritan made his own personal response - he was able to connect with a man in trouble who was not part of his social circle.

Pope Francis is very insistent on this - that we stop outsourcing - he says the calling of Christians is to become personally involved. However - he emphasises these rights must be held in balance with responsibilities, that poor people must be involved - involved in a process of change and responsibility. This element of relationship runs right through the themes of biblical justice.

Did you know the meaning of lending money in Hebrew - *keseftalve* - is close to "accompaniment"? Lending as accompaniment.

In God's economy, if you're having a hard time, I'm to walk in relationship with you - accompany you until you get back on your feet - for as long as it takes. Not just give cash and leave you alone. The Christian social justice tradition is anchored in God's economy of mutual obligation and right relationship.

Building common good, being relational

So to resist this dehumanising culture, to be God's people we are called to be non-tribal, to make connections with people outside our social circles, especially across socio-economic lines, because this is how we find harmony, it's how the community can feel itself.

So it's about building the kingdom of God wherever we are. It's less about handouts, activism and projects and more about relationship - and don't feel you aren't equipped to contribute - age doesn't matter, in fact older people understand better what friendship requires. This puts the spotlight on ordinary next door neighbours. It is about listening, engaging, understanding, attending to spiritual as well as material needs.

In practical terms can we create places where people feel welcome, places of encounter for all ages and backgrounds. The church is one of the last places where this is happening, so we need to build on that.

Can we make our foodbanks places of encounter rather than just distribution points. Can we work together to provide a dignified burial for a poor person? Can we always look for opportunities where everything becomes an occasion for communion?

At the local level we should be looking out for opportunities for alliances and partnerships, especially with those you would not usually come into contact with. On certain issues you may find you have a common mind - a common good.

There is a work to be done that involves us all. A mission that is of value not only to rebuild the confidence of a bruised and vulnerable church but of value to the whole of society: and that is the work of restoring the language of community in its authentic, real, local sense, it's about a reweaving - how we speak about each other, about the place of the family, about what integrity means in human relationships, about how we rebuild trust, how we understand our sense of mutual obligation and belonging, how we rebuild relationships. As Christians we need to offer people a taste of the kingdom. By being more beatitudinal, by being more covenantal, by strengthening family life.

Through our churches, schools and local Christian groups we need to talk the language of forgiveness and redemption - not just in religious terms, but in human terms - to offer a way back for people into society again who have become peripheral, because of things they've done or because of what's been done to them.

There is a need to not only offer to pray for people, but to teach people how to pray. Too often there are assumptions made that this is a given, but it isn't anymore. We need to open up the beautiful traditions of our Christian spirituality - Ignatian, Celtic and so on, and empower people to have their own conversation with God, to assure them that God wants to be in relationship with them, to hear their voice.

There's no question that we are entering a dark time. The symptoms and pathologies are connected and too numerous. And for the churches, it may feel like it's all over. But God is at work. If we listen, we will see He is doing something profound. He's preparing us to send us out. Fundamentally this is about becoming more attentive to what God is doing, and recognising where each of us is called to participate in the reweaving of our common life.

DISCUSSION

What does "reweaving" mean for me, where I live and work?

That brings us nearly to the end of our session this morning. So as we conclude, let's say this prayer together. This is the prayer we've used at every meeting over the last twelve years.

The Together for the Common Good prayer

Glory be to the father, the son and the Holy Spirit +

Come Holy Spirit. We welcome you here in our midst.

Govern our hearts and minds, govern every aspect of our time together.

Be in every thought and word; in every intention and motive.

Lord, we thank you for those who have been an inspiration to us.

Thank you, for calling us through the Gospel to work together, and for each other.

We pray for others working for the Common Good and for those who resist it.

Bind us together across our traditions and move our heart's desire closer to the heart of your desire for us.

Lord, give us the grace do your will, and make our mission a joy.

In the love of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

RESOURCES

Before we end, can I just point you to some resources to help you after today. Let me show you our website togetherforthecommongood.co.uk where you will find lots of wonderful free resources, you can sign up to our newsletter, and if you have the means, please help this work to continue by making a monthly donation.

You'll also find a link to our podcast, [Leaving Egypt](#) where we explore what it means to be God's people in an age of unravelling, read the signs of the times and hear stories of the reweaving on the ground.



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