Happy New Year! Is February to late to say that? Quite possibly, but since this is our first issue of 2022 it seems appropriate. I don't know about you but I often feel really bombarded at the start of a year with, what is essentially, guilt tripping within marketing. Everywhere you look there are ads to lose weight, book the best holiday, have the best looking house, to have the happiest year… it all get's quite overwhelming. As a household we made a conscious effort to recognise all of this marketing, to call it out and to not let it negatively influence us. But what we did do is think about what it is that we want to try and 'action' this year. What can we do to try and make a small difference? Maybe adjusting our food intake to reduce our carbon footprint, maybe reading a book on a new area or maybe signing petitions that we're passionate about. What areas of social justice are you passionate about? What areas do you want to learn more about? One of our hopes for the SR News is that it will help you answer those questions! Hopefully this issue gets the year off to an interesting start and inspires you to find out more or get involved.
Poverty and Deprivation - Aren't They the Same Thing?

The terminology is confusing. Poverty and deprivation are not quite the same thing; and, even if you define poverty in purely financial terms (which not everyone does), there are different approaches to how you measure it. Plus, with deprivation, there are seven indices of multiple deprivation, of which income is but one. Confused? I’m not surprised!

A glance at the deprivation statistics for England for 2019 (so pre-pandemic) shows swathes of deprivation across areas of the country, of which our Diocese is not one. However, zoom in, and you immediately notice that we do indeed have areas which are amongst the 10% most deprived in the country, and other places not far behind. Deprivation is undoubtedly present, but often in smaller pockets and spread more diffusely than in some parts of the country. And there are places where the deprivation statistics mask the depth of financial poverty.

Of course, as Churches, we know our own areas. Even in our more affluent benefices, we know the areas and streets where people struggle to hold life together financially. We know where Foodbanks and similar are needed. I would contend that there is not a benefice in this Diocese where there isn’t a household in need – and it can be really hard to be living in hidden poverty in an area of affluence.

You know yourself how the cost of daily living has increased. Indeed, you may be having to make hard choices about where your money goes. We’ve talked for a long time about zero hour contracts and, while COVID has altered the job market and shortages provide some good job opportunities, those who need jobs can’t always access them, transport systems can be poor and mechanisms such as childcare are not always available or affordable. All this contributes to untenable and unstable household situations. Add in the fact that, no matter what a hard a person works, they cannot match income to expenditure – here is a long-term intractable and deeply unjust situation.

The Social Welfare Cell recognises that, and are doing all they can to alleviate and soften the impact. But there is a further twist, there just isn’t enough financial advice around to enable such families to at least make their money go as far as it possibly can.

The system of funding advice and support is at a place of uncertainty, awaiting for places of power to pronounce on directions of travel, the awarding of contracts at local levels and all the things which enable qualified people to sit at local contact points and offer holistic, person-centred advice to those at their financial wits end. But there is hope. Through organisations like Money Matters, Hope 67, Trinity Money Advice and others affiliated to the Gospel-inspired Community Money Advice network. CAP is also a different, but well-known tried and tested, route to providing support to those in financial difficulties.
Poverty and Deprivation - Aren't They the Same Thing? Cont.

Whatever happens at an official high level we, the Church, need to consider our response in the light of Biblical imperatives around poverty and debt and we need to act. From the above list of organisations, it is clear we don't have to start from scratch. We have people of commitment and skills in these areas within our communities.

Poverty and debt is dehumanising and debilitating. We've moved from the stereotypes of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Indeed, the whole concept of 'the poor' is one to be challenged. Many of those reading this could themselves be among those who are facing the complexities of the benefits system, applying for council financial support, facing repossession or court processes, racking up unsustainable debts...... and so on. If not you, it may be in your wider family circle – I know it is within mine. These are people whom we know and value. Whom God knows and values.

If you’d like to explore further some of the issues raised, please do not hesitate to contact Alison Adams: alison.adams@leicestercofe.org

Let's Talk About Ableism

Within society as a whole, and within our diocese, we have heard lots of talk and have seen change surrounding issues of racism, homophobia and/or sexism for example. But have you heard of Ableism before?

Essentially, Ableism is discriminating against disabled people and viewing disability negatively. Where it get's more tricky is realising just how common Ableism is. As with lots of forms of discrimination, most people don't even realise they are doing it, it is learnt over time and often subconsciously. For example, have you ever noticed how lots of tv/movie villains have a disability? Bond villains, Voldemort, Captain Hook, The Grand High Witch, I could go on. This subconsciously teaches our brains that a disability is not only a bad thing but is something to be feared.

How is learning about Ableism relevant to churches and to our church families? The Bishop's Advisor on Disability, Emily Williams, has filmed a 3min video about Ableism and answers that question. Watch it here!
A Lawyer or an Actress?

The wonderful Florence Gildea has joined the Diocese of Leicester as Social Policy Advisor to Bishop Martyn. As you might imagine this role has a lot to do with the social responsibility panel and so it felt only right that we gave her the chance to introduce herself to you here:

"Growing up, I wanted to be either a lawyer or Julia Roberts. Which is to say I wanted to be important, highly esteemed, and rich. I was a good little capitalist, drawing pictures and making paper trinkets to sell to my parents' friends. I even had a little business suit from Debenhams.

But when I became a Christian aged 18, my existential compass shifted, and with it my mental pictures of the good life. I was no longer captivated by dreams of social mobility and living a life worthy of MTV Cribs. I started to look around me and be struck by a sense of hollowness: encouragements to consume, to shop, to indulge were omnipresent, but the feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and despair they were meant to satisfy, or at least mask, were just as widespread. On one hand were the invitations of 'more, more, more!' and on the other was the nagging question: 'is this it?'

I stopped being able to ignore how success had to be bought at the expense of others. Blessed – though it at times felt more like a curse, compared to the bliss of ignorance - with the eyes of faith, I started to notice those who were being left behind or downtrodden by our pursuits of progress and pleasure.

That is the perspective I hope to bring to the role of Bishop Martyn's Social Policy Adviser. As followers of Jesus, the Church must always keep drawing people's attention back to 'the least of these', those who are being forgotten, those who it would be convenient to ignore. Then, with our pastoral mission in line with our prophetic missives, we have to demonstrate to those on the margins that they are remembered and cherished – and that they don't need to be a lawyer or Julia Roberts to be loved."

If you'd like to hear more from Florence, to learn more about her role, her experience and what excites her about social action then you can watch her interview with Jon Barrett here.
The New Plan For Immigration - Better or Worse?

In 2006 when John Rid - the former Home Secretary in the Tony Blair government - declared "it is not fit for the purpose" for the Home Office, especially for the UK immigration system, there have been many major changes in the immigration system. This latest plan is no exception. You may well have seen the headlines:

But, beyond the headlines, what is this new plan for immigration? And how it might affect us? Well, the plan tries to achieve three significant aims:

1. To increase the fairness and efficacy of our system
2. To deter illegal entry into the UK
3. To remove those with no right to be here more easily from the UK

On the surface it may seem like these are firm but fair. The home office has already done many good things according to this plan: it's brought thousands of vulnerable and desperate refugees from Syria and Afghanistan to the UK as part of resettlement schemes, it's worked closely with the local authorities, charity and volunteer sectors to serve these new arrivals as part of the Community Sponsorship Scheme and it's allowed some skilled workers and their families to work in the UK to fill up the gap in the job market.

However, the most challenging part of the plan is mainly focused on the third aim; removing illegal immigrants. If this new plan becomes law, asylum seekers coming from any country will become illegal immigrants, including our former EU partners. In other words, not only is the reason for their application considered but how they came to the UK is measured too. Therefore the government will try to remove them from the UK. Let's look at an example:
If/When the government fails to remove this huge number of people from the UK, they are cut off from most of the legal benefits and supports and are highly likely to end up being forced into unsafe work and living situations. History has shown us that putting a large number of people under enormous pressure won’t bring a good result. And it affects all of us, migrant or non-migrant.

As Bishop Mullally pointed out in the house of the Lords,

“Contrary to the intention of the bill, there is much that might exacerbate modern slavery, not reduce it.”

So what is the solution? It seems Bishop Guli Dehqani in her speech in the House of Lords, has summarised a potential solution very well: ‘How different discussions might be if we reframed the debate in terms of the best way to work with potential future citizens, neighbours, and friends.’ She continues ‘We need a policy framework that gives future citizens the chance to contribute in meaningful ways.’

With the majority the government has in both Houses and the current political climate in the country, it seems this new plan for immigration might have a good chance of being put into action. As Christians, we must pray for protection for the vulnerable and voiceless and, through our churches, we must seek out and support those who need it.

\[28,431 + 725,000 = 753,431\]

no. of migrants that crossed the English Channel in 2021

no. of irregular migrations in the UK (strictly between 650-800K).

no. of individuals the government will end up trying to remove from the UK - about twice the population size of Leicester!
Are you looking for some book recommendations that will help you to learn more about issues of social justice within our society? Are you wanting to learn how you and your church can help tackle said issues? The following books are recommended by some of the SR Panel and will hopefully be really interesting and educational for you. If you purchase any of them from the bookshop within St Martin's House and quote 'SR News' then you will get 10% off!!

Bookmarked!

For Good. The Church And The Future of Welfare.
S. Wells, R. Rook, D. Barclay

Disability & The Gospel
M. S. Beates

Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church
S. Raah

Slavery-Free Communities
D. Pratt

How to Include Autistic Children and Young People in Church.
M. Arnold

Who is my Neighbour?
R. Carter

The Ungrateful Refugee
D. Nayeri

Embracing Justice
I. Hamley
Keep a look out for our next issue coming out in April!