

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad i Gydlyniant Cymdeithasol

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) on the [inquiry into Social Cohesion](#)

SC 12

Ymateb gan: Cynhadledd Esgobion Catholig Cymru a Lloegr

Response from: Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Executive Summary

- **Community initiatives** – The Catholic Church in Wales actively supports social cohesion through parish networks, charitable organisations, and faith-based outreach. Initiatives such as food banks, interfaith dialogues, and social support services help bridge ethnic, socio-economic, and religious divides.
- **Catholic schools are centres for diversity** – Catholic schools in Wales play a crucial role in fostering social integration due to their diverse student population, larger-than-average catchment areas, and commitment to serving socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.
- **Support for migrants and refugees** – Parishes and agencies provide vital assistance to migrants and refugees, promoting a culture of welcome through practical support and community sponsorship schemes.
- **Rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders** – Charities and chaplaincies contribute to criminal justice reform by supporting rehabilitation programmes for ex-offenders. Initiatives such as the HMPPS Wales Grand Avenues project provides mentoring, skills training, and community reintegration support to reduce reoffending and promote social stability.
- **Support for marginalised communities** – Our local communities support those who are racially or ethnically threatened, as well as seafarers who arrive in Welsh ports from all over the world.

- **Encouraging Interfaith Dialogue** – The Catholic community works hard to build bridges not just between ourselves and other Christian faiths, but also between our Jewish and Muslim friends, in order to ensure that shared action and goals are fostered with a community spirit in mind.

Introduction

1. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is the permanent assembly of Catholic bishops across the two member nations and acts as a national representative body of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.
2. Catholics make up 5% of the population in Wales. Women make up more of the Catholic population than men, with three women (59%) to every two men (41%). 45% of the Catholic community are under 45.¹
3. The Catholic community in England and Wales is hugely ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse. Influenced by waves of immigration, the Catholic community made up of a large number of people from migrant backgrounds, including but not limited to, those with recent Italian, Filipino, Indian, Nigerian, Irish, Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian heritage.
4. Catholic schools reflect the diversity within the Catholic community. According to the last census data from Catholic schools across England and Wales, 45% of pupils in Catholic state-funded secondary schools are from ethnic minority backgrounds compared with 37% nationally.² The catchment areas of Catholic schools are, on average, ten times larger than those of community schools. A larger catchment area increases social mixing and children from different communities and areas are brought together.
5. We share the commitment of the Equality and Social Justice Committee's desire to ensure social cohesion for the next generation. The Catholic Church has a long-standing commitment to promoting social cohesion through its parish ministries, social initiatives, and charitable outreach. Through its extensive parish networks, schools, and charitable initiatives, the Church responds to key social cohesion issues such as the integration of migrants and refugees, racial justice, mental health support, and reintegration of ex-

¹ [Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales report by The Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society](#)

² [CES Census Data](#)

offenders. It actively promotes best practice interventions by facilitating community-led initiatives that bring people together across ethnic, socio-economic, and religious divides, including food banks, interfaith dialogue, and educational programmes that encourage inclusivity and understanding.

Key Issues and Best Practices for Social Cohesion

Catholic parishes at the heart of serving local communities

6. At the most basic level, the presence of a church building, which often has many facilities attached to it, provides a place for people to meet and build social relationships. Church halls often provide a space in which to host youth groups, food banks, social clubs etc.³ This is particularly important given the decline of community spaces. This also provides a bridging opportunity where people can connect despite differences in ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, and culture.
7. St Joseph's Food Hub and Community Fridge, based at St Joseph's Catholic Church in Colwyn Bay, is a prime example of how parishes can provide essential support to local communities⁴. By redistributing surplus food, the initiative not only tackles food insecurity but also fosters social cohesion by bringing people together in an environment of care and mutual support.
8. A study by Age UK⁵ has drawn attention to the social isolation and loneliness faced by so many elderly people within our communities. Churches can be instrumental in providing a place for elderly people to meet and form relationships, and there are also various initiatives to help them feel more connected and supported. One example of such an initiative is the St Vincent de Paul society's befriending service, which made 475,064 visits and spent 625,084 hours visiting last year.⁶
9. The value of community-based relational care for those struggling with mental health problems such as loneliness, anxiety and depression is especially important. For example, many Catholic charities - such as St Vincent De Paul conferences in local Catholic parishes -

³ Theos Think Tank, [The Church and Social Cohesion](#)

⁴ St Joseph's Colwyn Bay <https://stjosephsrcc.org.uk/st-josephs-food-hub-community-fridge>

⁵ Age UK, [Loneliness research and impact](#)

⁶ St Vincent de Paul Society, [Visiting and Befriending](#)

do excellent work in supporting the mental health needs within the community, based on the healing value of loving, caring relationships that can co-exist alongside clinical treatment when needed⁷. Such Catholic charities and organisations, among many others, can play vital roles in providing community-based mental health care through social prescribing programmes.

Catholic schools support for parental and community engagement

- 10.** We believe that schools are a vital space for fostering social cohesion, because they can engage with children, families, and local communities to develop mutual trust and respect. There are 79 Catholic schools in Wales, which educate over 28,000 students. Of these, around half are non-Catholics. Our schools represent the multicultural heritage of the Catholic community across Wales and draw heavily on our old and new migrant communities—45% of pupils in Catholic state-funded schools are from ethnic minority backgrounds, compared to 37% nationally. Because they were founded to serve the poor, Catholic schools remain consistently more socioeconomically mixed than the national average. 19.4% of pupils at Catholic primary schools live in the most deprived areas compared with 12.9% nationally, while 17.4% of pupils at Catholic secondary schools live in the most deprived areas compared with 11.6% nationally.
- 11.** Schools play a key role in engaging families and local organisations to promote cohesion. Initiatives such as St Patrick and St Edmund’s Catholic Primary School’s breakfast club highlight the value of practical support, and practical community cohesion, for families in need⁸. Beyond providing meals, the club fosters social interaction among pupils, helping them develop interpersonal skills while reflecting Gospel values of service and care. Families within school communities feel cared for and valued, which adds a sense of community spirit where it is needed most. When schools address the material challenges that hinder community cohesion, the benefits are felt not just by students but by the wider family as well. Programmes that provide practical support, such as breakfast clubs and uniform assistance, alleviate financial pressures on families. These initiatives reduce stigma and promote equal opportunities, ensuring that all children can fully participate in school and community life.

⁷ [St Vincent de Paul Society](#)

⁸ St Patrick’s Catholic Primary School, [Breakfast club](#)

Migrants and refugees

- 12.** A 2021 study found that one in six people in England and Wales were born outside the UK, highlighting the diversity of our communities.⁹ Pope Francis reminds us that migrants and refugees are individuals with unique stories, not just statistics—they are “first of all persons who have faces, names, and individual stories”.¹⁰ It is essential to address concerns about migration responsibly, without allowing them to be exploited for political gain or fuel xenophobia. Catholic communities understand they have an important role in fostering a culture of welcome and support for migrants and refugees.¹¹
- 13.** There are many ways that local parishes can be a refuge, providing spiritual and practical support. Diocesan and national Catholic agencies support this work. Another example of parish involvement in welcoming refugees in their community is through the Community Sponsorship scheme which is a programme created by the Home Office that allows refugees to enter the UK with the support of a dedicated group of volunteers.¹²

Reintegrating prisoners into society

- 14.** Our vision is of a criminal justice system that is truly restorative, combining care for victims, just punishment of offences and the reform, rehabilitation and redemption of offenders. This vision of criminal justice is grounded in the inherent human dignity shared by each human person, including both victims and offenders, and we provide around 150 full-time and voluntary prison chaplains across England and Wales.
- 15.** Civil society plays a vital role in rehabilitating offenders. Charities and voluntary groups working alongside the justice system, offer spaces for healing and reintegration, drawing on local knowledge and a shared commitment to human dignity.
- 16.** They can work together to help provide life skills and routes into employment. A notable example can be seen in the HMPPS Wales Grand Avenues project in Cardiff, Wales.¹³ This is a ten-year pilot project whereby people on probation are supervised and supported by

⁹ Office for National Statistics, [International migration, England and Wales](#)

¹⁰ Pope Francis, [Meeting with the People of Lesbos \(2016\)](#)

¹¹ CBCEW, [Love The Stranger](#), p.20

¹² Catholic Care, [Helping Ukrainian Refugees](#)

¹³ Telescope, [Case Study: Grand Avenues](#)

local community hubs and charities, such as the St Vincent de Paul Centre in Ely Bridge, Cardiff.¹⁴ The project is premised on the view that the challenge of rehabilitation has a significant relational aspect which is often underserved by current probation services. The approach is guided by the view that the aim of probation must be the re-integration of the offender into the community. Peer mentoring, practical advice and opportunities to use their skills to support the community can all combine to provide a renewed sense of identity and community for those on probation, so that ex-offenders can make new and positive contributions to the community. Community chaplaincies can similarly play a vital role in supporting those who are leaving prison in their transition to the community.¹⁵ In addition, Catholic prison charities, such as the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), together with Catholic chaplaincies, provide pre- and post-release support for prisoners which has a significant impact on their re-integration into the community.¹⁶

Racial justice

17. The Catholic community across England and Wales is incredibly diverse. We reflect the multicultural nature of the wider Catholic Church and many Catholics in Wales are members of old and new migrant communities, and therefore respect and understanding of diversity and a key aspect of our community. One way that Catholic churches across Wales have shown their commitment to counter racism, in co-operation with other Christian denominations has been through the promotion of Racial Justice Sunday by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.
18. In areas where there may be a high number of individuals from a similar cultural background 'ethnic chaplaincies' have been created. Individuals who originate from a different culture may feel isolated when moving to the UK, and the Church recognises this need for understanding and belonging, providing pastoral care and community events for Catholic ethnic communities through ethnic chaplaincies.

Supporting marginalised seafaring communities

¹⁴ St Vincent de Paul Society, [Cardiff's Grand Avenues Project, A Beneficiary](#)

¹⁵ For example, see: Dr E. Phillips, et al., [Flourishing Inside: Catholic Social Thought and Prison Pastoral Work \(2022\) p. 7.](#)

¹⁶ [Pact](#)

- 19.** Stella Maris also plays a crucial role in combating modern slavery within the maritime industry. They work closely with ports, shipping companies, law enforcement, and anti-trafficking bodies to identify and support victims of exploitation. Through these efforts, Stella Maris ensures that seafarers and fishers arriving in Welsh ports receive comprehensive support, addressing both their immediate needs and long-term welfare.
- 20.** Stella Maris is an international maritime charity that provides practical, pastoral, and spiritual support to seafarers, fishers, and their families. In Wales, including ports such as Cardiff, their work is coordinated by Senior Area Port Chaplain Deacon Nick O'Neill, who oversees a team of chaplains across Wales. The charity's services in Welsh ports encompass ship visits, pastoral care, practical assistance and advocacy.¹⁷

Ecumenical and interfaith dialogue

- 21.** There are numerous initiatives supported by Catholic churches which involve working across Christian denominations and with people of other faiths. Cytûn, the Interfaith Council for Wales¹⁸, and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)¹⁹ are inter-denominational partnerships which have a Catholic presence.
- 22.** As well as cohesion between Christian groups, we also seen the importance of fostering connections with other faiths. Interfaith Week²⁰ is one way that we can highlight the importance of dialogue and shared action. Challenges have arisen since the closure of the Interfaith Network by the government in 2024, a decision that disappointed many bishops within the CBCEW.
- 23.** Additionally, grassroots efforts, such as the Christian Muslim Forum, the Council of Christians and Jews, and programmes such as Near Neighbours²¹, funded by the government, encourage collaboration at local levels.

¹⁷ [Stella Maris](#)

¹⁸ See: [Inter Faith Wales](#)

¹⁹ See: [Catholics Together in Britain and Ireland](#)

²⁰ See: [Inter Faith Week](#)

²¹ See: [Near Neighbours](#)