

CAFOD Lent Fast Day Message

February 2021

Have you, or has someone you love, had a COVID jab? The UK's fast roll-out of COVID jabs is bringing hope to the population, particularly to elderly and vulnerable people. We all long for a return to life closer to what we knew before the pandemic struck. We're counting down the weeks until we can return to eating in restaurants, having haircuts and booking holidays.

As we cheer on the UK for leading the pack of countries getting populations vaccinated, it is natural to ask about our neighbours in poorer countries. They have not had the opportunity to order millions of doses of any vaccine. With our own vaccine programmes well underway, we readily support the idea of banding together with other wealthy countries to ensure that developing countries similarly get access to vaccines at affordable prices, or even for free. We all understand that none of us is really safe from Coronavirus until we are all safe.

Why is the need to act in solidarity with the less fortunate so obvious in the fight against Coronavirus, but less so when we talk of defeating poverty or addressing grossly unequal living standards? Is it because we can easily visualise COVID sufferers along with those little vials and syringes that promise protection?

If we try, we can also visualise people living where there is no fresh water supply nearby, or where war has destroyed homes, hospitals, schools and entire cities. As I turn on the tap in the bathroom or kitchen, I think about stories of people in Ethiopia who must walk for miles and miles each day to fetch a bucket-full of water for their family's cooking, drinking and washing. And while standing in the queue waiting to enter a grocery store, I try to imagine how it would feel to wonder where I could find the next meal for my family in a war zone in Yemen. Sadly, there is no quick fix like a vaccine for the chronic inequality of circumstances and life chances that afflicts so many of our brothers and sisters in poorer or conflict-ridden countries.

Nations coming together to make COVID vaccines available to the poor is a strong reminder of the power of collective efforts. In a way, that is what CAFOD does twice a year in its Lent and Harvest appeals at parishes throughout England and Wales. By coming together, we can change things for people living beyond our shores, people whose lives we can barely imagine. We can help bring them some of the things they need, be it solar-powered water pumps to operate a village well, or food for families and babies facing starvation.

Perhaps we might be spurred to action by reflecting that, on balance, our deprivations under lockdown are light compared with the ordinary living conditions of so many millions living in poorer countries. As our government moves to share the UK's wealth of vaccines, perhaps we might likewise share some of our relative good fortune with others far away, whose needs and suffering challenge our imagination.

Please join me in supporting the CAFOD Lent fast day collection after masses on February 27-28. Envelopes with a gift aid form will be available at the back of the church from Saturday, February 20th. If you prefer to give online, you can do so at [Lent Appeal 2021 | CAFOD](#).

Thank you for sharing what you can. Please pray that a spirit of collective concern for all of our brothers and sisters around the world survives the present COVID pandemic. Let genuine care for the less fortunate become embedded in our hearts and minds, making it part of our "new normal" post-COVID life.