

*“I was sick and you visited me” (Matthew 25:36)*

Care and compassion towards those who are sick in mind, body and soul are central to what it means to follow Christ. Christ identified himself with those who were unwell and called for his followers to pay the same attention to those in need.

On World Mental Health Day 2024, we particularly remember the important issue of workplace mental health. For many of us, our workplace is a central hub of our daily life. It can provide a sense of purpose, belonging and connection, strengthening our mental health in the face of life's challenges.

The dignity of work has long been recognised as a central principle of Catholic social teaching. As Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si'* (2015), “work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment”.

In practice, however, workplaces can also be sources of stress, depression and anxiety, which can harm our mental health. It is estimated that 15% of UK workers have an existing mental health condition; 875,000 workers suffered from work-related stress, depression and anxiety in 2022-23; and mental health was the fifth most common reason for sickness absence in 2022.

Given these challenges, it is vital that workplaces are equipped to recognise and respond to the mental health needs of their workers, from fostering healthy and supportive relationships to ensuring employees are paid justly and supported to spend time with their loved ones and at rest.

Today also marks World Homeless Day and we know that 80% of homeless people report suffering from mental health problems. We must remember the physical and psychological suffering of the large number of people who live on our streets and continue to support and encourage the great work of Catholic parishes and charities in caring for those in such difficult circumstances.

While there have been significant improvements in our cultural awareness and acceptance of the importance of mental health in recent years, there remain many opportunities to improve in our support for those struggling with their mental health. The work of Catholic charities such as Catholic Care in Leeds and the Kenelm Youth Trust in Birmingham, amongst very many others, is especially valuable in helping those suffering from mental health problems. Many Catholics will have the opportunity to join St Vincent de Paul Conferences in their local parishes through which they can visit those who are lonely or in special need of companionship. We encourage and celebrate this life-giving work.

We are all made in the image and likeness of God, and it is vital that we take care of our own mental health, and that safe and effective help is provided whenever needed, both inside and outside our workplaces.