

Life and faith in rural Britain...

COUNTRYWAY



Growing Compassionate Rural Communities

‘We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.’

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Compassion seems to be the buzz word these days, but do we really understand what it is and why we need it in today’s world? What does it look like?

My personal conviction and understanding is that a community marked by compassion seeks to include the vulnerable and marginalised, and works towards the integration of diverse groups and peoples.

What is the origin of the word ‘compassion’? In Latin, *compati* means to ‘suffer with’, or to identify with someone else’s suffering. It is interesting to look at some biblical texts that refer to compassion in the ministry and life of Jesus. Matthew 14 tells the story of two blind men sitting by a roadside; Jesus speaks to them and asks what they want. When the men explain that ‘we want our sight’, we hear that ‘Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him’ (Matthew 14:13-14).

A little later in the same gospel, Jesus encounters a widow accompanying the body of her only son. This time, Matthew says that when Jesus saw her, ‘his heart went out to her’ and his compassionate response resulted in her son being raised from the dead (Matthew 20:30-34).

There are a number of observations you can make from these two descriptions of Christ’s compassion. Firstly, Jesus is responding to clearly identified need and is moved by compassion to meet it. The need is acknowledged by Jesus and he responds to their calls for help. But these encounters also take place with people on the edges of the community, rejected and stigmatised.

These key principles underpin the vision and mission of Growing Compassionate Communities (growingcompassion.org.uk): we seek to promote inclusiveness to all peoples and groups, in order to reduce loneliness and isolation and challenge stigma.

We are encouraged by the way that our commitment to compassion is being perceived by those we reach out to in our local community:

‘I would like to add how much we enjoyed being part of the group. There was a tremendous sense of love in that hall that day and all the folks were really enjoying themselves. You are certainly doing a tremendous work in the neighbourhood for the vulnerable and their carers, and such a welcome is evident.’

True compassion changes the way we live and how we view pain and distress.

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You can find out more about Growing Compassionate Communities in Peter's book, *Growing a Compassionate Community: A model for action* (2019).

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