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The Lord Greenhalgh  
Minister of State  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
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Sent by email only to: [Stephen.greenhalgh@communities.gov.uk](mailto:Stephen.greenhalgh@communities.gov.uk)

26 May 2021

Dear Lord Greenhalgh

Thank you for the work you are doing in Government to support faith groups, particularly your work on the Covid Taskforce for Places of Worship.

I'm writing to ask for your support in helping faith groups to access all possible sources of Government funding to help rebuild from the pandemic and level up our communities.

It's clear that this next session of Parliament will be focused on recovery from the pandemic. The Government clearly has a role to play in this, not least in empowering civil society to meet the challenges we are seeing in communities across our country. The Catholic Union has called for this to be a moment not just for national recovery, but national renewal, by enabling civil society to flourish.<sup>i</sup>

I'm sure you are familiar with the huge amount of work being done by faith groups to support people through the pandemic, especially those on the margins of society and those hardest to reach through direct Government support. You might be aware of the recent study from the University of York into Churches, COVID-19 and Communities, which found that 87 per cent of churches regularly contacted the isolated.<sup>ii</sup>

Given the importance of faith groups in helping people recover from the pandemic, it was disappointing that there was little in the Queen's Speech about supporting civil society, and not a single mention of faith groups. Plans to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy on charities are welcome, but what charities need more than anything is financial support.

We have previously raised the possibility of an enhanced Gift Aid scheme with your colleague, Baroness Barran in DCMS, but we understand that the Government is not minded to support any changes at present.

There are other ways in which the Government can help faith groups, including through better promotion of existing grant schemes and clearer guidance on the purposes for which funds can be used.

The Covid Winter Grant Scheme, announced by the Government last year, provided funds to local authorities to "give vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the winter months". Despite many faith groups already doing similar work and being well placed to help administer funding at a ground level, there was no mention of faith groups in the Government's guidance for local councils on the Scheme.

We have similar concerns about the UK Community Renewal Fund, which was announced earlier this year as a precursor to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. While the ministerial foreword to the Fund states that it is designed to "empower places to explore how best to tackle local challenges", there is no mention of faith groups in the prospectus for the Fund, despite the hugely important work of faith groups in helping to tackle challenges in their communities.

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*The Catholic Union of Great Britain: The Voice of Catholics in Public Life*

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While I appreciate that Ministers want to avoid being seen to favour some partners above others when it comes to delivering services and securing funds, the Catholic Union believes that some small changes to existing guidance could make a big difference in supporting the work of faith groups.

Encouraging local authorities to explore options for working with faith groups would undoubtedly help to provide reassurance to some local councils. While in some places, partnering with faith groups is already happening successfully, there is more the Government could do to unlock the potential of faith groups to address local problems.

While it is too late to make changes to the Covid Winter Grant Scheme guidance, it is not too late to look at how faith groups could be included in administering funds from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund or other such funds in future.

This could be something for officials to look into to see what could be done to ensure that faith groups are able to fully participate in grant schemes in future.

The Catholic Union would be delighted to support you in any way in this work. We would be delighted to meet you to discuss this matter if that would be helpful.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With my best regards,



**Nigel Parker**

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cc.

- The Baroness Barran, Minister for Civil Society
- Colin Bloom, Faith Engagement Adviser

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<sup>i</sup> <https://catholicunion.org.uk/2021/05/catholic-union-responds-to-queens-speech-2021/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2021/research/churches-role-pandemic-recovery/>