

Reflections by Elizabeth Carey, Parish CAFOD Representative Lent Fast Day 2026

There is a saying along the lines of: Don't give a hungry person food but instead the tools and means to grow crops and become self-sufficient. Here in Central London that's hard to imagine, since even a plant pot on a balcony is out of reach for most people. Sadly, Marylebone is not blessed with allotments. In truth, we depend on an extensive supply chain that extends well beyond our shores to get our proverbial daily bread.

In some parts of the world, people work hard to feed themselves from the land they farm. Climate change means that droughts or excessive rainfall can undermine those efforts to be self-sufficient. That's what happened to farmers in Zimbabwe (droughts) and South Sudan and Bangladesh (devastating flooding). How should one respond when farms and farming tools get washed away or rendered unusable?

CAFOD's partners in Zimbabwe, Bangladesh and South Sudan have been helping local people reinvent farming practices where climate events make growing life's basics challenging and risky. Drought resistant seeds have been paired with solar-powered wells to source water for crops suffering from drought. Elsewhere, in response to flooding, fields have been transformed into floating garden plots, allowing farmers to protect their crops from being washed away.

Extreme weather makes it more complicated to give hungry people the means to help themselves. We can admire the ingenuity and resilience of people like Shorai in Zimbabwe or Rejoice in South Sudan, who have transformed their farms through the innovative solutions mentioned above. These solutions require up-front investment and training. That is where CAFOD's partners on the ground, backed by our generous financial support, are making a real difference. Help from CAFOD's partners allows Shorai and Rejoice to restore their family plots such that they again support life-sustaining crops for their families and communities.

Who enabled this transformative farming practice? We did: CAFOD is us in parishes across England and Wales. Helping people grow sufficient crops to sustain their families means we are helping feed the hungry even if we cannot reach them directly. When we help our brothers and sisters to feed themselves, we are recognising God's image in them. As Jesus said, "I was hungry and you fed me." We are called to help our less fortunate brothers and sisters feed themselves and their families. Where crops grow again, families can eat, children can thrive and hope returns.

Please join me in giving to CAFOD (Caritas International in England and Wales) again this Lent. CAFOD's Lent Fast Day appeal is on 7-8 March. You can do this by: · Giving online at Lent Appeal 2026 (please indicate St. James's Spanish Place and the post code W1U 3QY after you submit payment details);

· Scanning the QR code on the CAFOD poster, donation envelopes or on lanyards worn by CAFOD volunteers;

· Using St. James's contactless giving machines. Choose the Second Collection option; or

· Giving by cash or cheque in the special collections at the end of each mass on 7-8 March.

Please take an envelope as you leave church on the weekend of 28 February – 1 March.

However you give, please add Gift Aid if you are eligible.

Thank you for your generosity and prayers. Your gifts today help our neighbours to restore food and hope. In the future, it will benefit us more directly. Some of the techniques now being pioneered in far-away places may one day be re-imported to help our green and pleasant land similarly resist the ravages of climate change.

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