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New British Prime Minister Andy Burnham chats with residents and staff members as he visits a nursing home in London July 29, 2026. U.K. bishops welcomed the new Catholic prime minister's approach to palliative care as Catholic charities urged him to turn to his faith to support the poor and to take action on the climate crisis. (OSV News/Reuters/Kirsty Wigglesworth)

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U.K. bishops welcomed new Catholic Prime Minister Andy Burnham's approach to palliative care as Catholic charities urged him to turn to his faith to support the poor and to take action on the climate crisis.

Archbishop John Sherrington of Liverpool and lead bishop for life issues for the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, has welcomed Burnham's call "for palliative care services to be properly funded."

The prime minister has stated that palliative care and social care funding need to be "fixed" so that vulnerable people can have "peace of mind" about the care that they receive towards the end of their life.

"It is highly significant that the Prime Minister has confirmed his position about the need for proper palliative and social care ahead of the Second Reading of the fundamentally flawed Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill in September," Sherrington said in a July 29 statement.

After the first attempt to legalize assisted dying failed in the British Parliament in the spring, another attempt to introduce the bill is scheduled for Sept. 11.

"People who are dying are vulnerable and need compassionate care and spiritual accompaniment until their last breath," Sherrington said, urging parliamentarians "to vote against this dangerous legislation" during the Sept. 11 session "and to work together to ensure that our palliative and social care services can be held up as examples of truly dignified care at the end of life for all."

"We have consistently called for meaningful investment in palliative and end of life care as an appropriate focus to uphold the dignity of all at the end of life and opposed a bill seeking to legalize assisted suicide," Sherrington said.

Burnham, the U.K.'s first Catholic-born prime minister, has long spoken about the influence his faith has on his political outlook, saying: "Catholic social teaching underpins my politics."

No sooner had Burnham started work as prime minister than messages came in, urging him to put his faith into action.

Burnham's Catholic influence was seen even before he took office as he visited London homelessness charity The Passage in London hours before being appointed. The values and ethos of The Passage come from the teachings and example of St. Vincent de Paul. During his opening speech as prime minister, Burnham vowed to "end rough sleeping in our country."

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"It's about putting the right values and the right standards at the heart of government," he said July 20.

Caritas Salford is a charity supporting homeless and poor people in Greater Manchester and Lancashire, where Burnham was previously mayor. Burnham, a former altar boy, previously served as culture secretary and health secretary before taking on the role of mayor in 2017.

Referring to his own interactions with Burnham, director Patrick O'Dowd told OSV News that "Andy Burnham has visited our Cornerstone day center in Manchester, which supports people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of becoming so."

O'Dowd welcomed Burnham's commitment to ending "rough sleeping," or homelessness, describing Burnham as "a leader who is certainly aware of the importance of Catholic social teaching."

Caritas Salford is calling for urgent support for children in extreme poverty after recent data revealed many children are living in poor conditions and arriving at school with holes in their shoes.

O'Dowd said: "We see all too often families who are living in cold, damp houses. We're keen for Andy Burnham to drive rapid change forward and keep people at the heart of the decisions he makes."

In October 2025, giving a lecture for the religious think tank Theos, Burnham called for a new way of doing politics which has "trust, community, faith, belief, connection" at its heart.

Ending homelessness is not the only issue Catholics would like the new prime minister to address through his Catholic lens. The U.K. Catholic aid agency CAFOD is urging Burnham to call on his Catholic faith to take decisive action on the climate crisis and supporting poorer countries.

The government announced in February 2025 that the overseas aid budget would be cut from 0.5% to 0.3% of gross national income, adding later that the money saved would fund defense spending.

Neil Thorns, CAFOD's director of advocacy and education, told OSV News July 22, "The issue of overseas aid is critical. We want the aid budget to be restored. For us as Catholics, it's an expression of our solidarity with our brothers and sisters."

Thorns added that Burnham needs to focus on "financial reform issues" and enable "countries to work for their future to flourish."

In a 16 July letter to Burnham, CAFOD promised, with other charitable religious organizations, "to work alongside you in service of the common good."

The letter called on Burnham to "put climate and nature at the heart of your government's mission" and to provide "clean, affordable energy." CAFOD also called on Burnham to "deliver a strong G20 Presidency, by taking action on debt, tax and illicit financial flows."

Focusing on debt relief, CAFOD wants the government to pass a law that will require private lenders to participate in debt relief on the same terms as other lenders, so they can no longer make huge profits from countries struggling with unsustainable debts.

Thorns told OSV News that the debt crisis "is affecting those low-income countries and preventing them (from) spending money on climate response or health and education. (Burnham has) really got to look beyond our national borders and view the world as Catholic social teaching tells us to: How do you recognize your brothers and sisters around the world?"

There are also genuine hopes among Catholic charities for Burnham to make an impact on justice issues. The Catholic justice group Caritas Social Action Network, or CSAN, has invited Burnham to discuss how to "build flourishing communities," while the U.K.'s Jesuit Refugee Service has urged the British prime minister "to build a humane asylum system."

In his message of congratulations July 20, Archbishop Richard Moth of Westminster, president of the bishops' conference, called for Burnham "to respond with real concern and respect for the dignity of the person, for the needs of families, the marginalized, and the vulnerable. "

Meanwhile, Bishop Peter Collins of East Anglia, has called the reintroduction of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill a "watershed moment for our country," and has urged greater resources to be directed toward palliative care services.

The bill, Collins said, "leaves many matters unresolved regarding its practical application and its profound implications for those who are disabled or vulnerable."

"Rather than any consideration of assisted suicide, our society should surely be addressing the need to establish and resource a universal provision of palliative care across the country," Collins added.