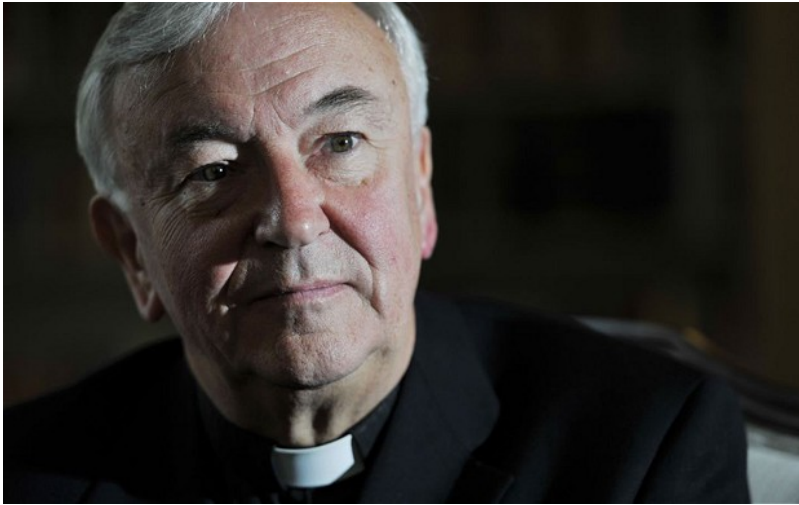


Politicians face 'test of civilisation' over elderly care, says Archbishop

POLITICIANS will fail a “fundamental test of civilised society” if they do not find a solution to funding care for the elderly, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales had warned.



The Archbishop of Westminster, the Most Rev Vincent of Nichols, said the crisis was one of the “biggest challenges of our generation”.

He said the current system is leaving many elderly, frail and disabled people struggling to meet their basic human needs and needs “urgent” reform.

The Archbishop was speaking at a reception in the House of Commons for representatives of the Caritas Social Action Network of Catholic charities.

Highlighting the problems of unemployment, poverty, criminal justice reform and care, he said: “The decisions that will be made in this building over the months ahead demonstrate the importance of this dialogue between those working on the front line to support the vulnerable, and those tasked with crafting legislation.

“Perhaps one of the most important areas currently under consideration here is how we care for older and disabled people: a fundamental test of any civilised society.

“I applaud the efforts underway from many quarters to address shortcomings in the care system, and encourage all those involved in this urgent and vital process.”

He added: “The current crisis in our care system today means that older, frail and disabled people are struggling to find and pay for care to help with every day needs like washing, dressing, taking medication or just getting out of the house.

“As our society ages and people live longer with long term conditions, more and more older and disabled people, and carers supporting them, aren't getting the support they need.

“We need all parts of society and all political parties to come together and take urgent action to tackle what is becoming one of the biggest public policy challenges of our generation.”

An estimated 40,000 people a year are forced to sell their homes to pay for care in their old age.

Costs are currently unlimited and only the very poorest, with assets including their home worth less than £23,500, qualify for any state support.

The Coalition is currently understood to be finalizing a deal to offer a form of universal social care.

But they are said to be looking at capping the cost at £75,000 – far in excess of the level recommended by the economist Andrew Dilnot in a landmark report last year.

John Bingham - The Telegraph