

## Parish of the Divine Compassion: Campaign for Dignity in Healthcare

*The Parish of the Divine Compassion covers 60,000 people in the London Borough of Newham – one of the most diverse places in a very diverse city. Revd Dr Angus Ritchie was Curate in the Parish when it began its first community organising campaign. He tells the story:*

“The Parish of the Divine Compassion was a founder member of [TELCO](#) (The East London Communities Organisation - part of what has now grown into [London Citizens](#)).

“The first thing a church does when it joins TELCO is to listen. We held lots of ‘one-to-one’ meetings, house groups and discussions, to work out the issues on which local people wanted to achieve changes.

“Our listening campaign had one very clear answer. Again and again, we heard of concern about the state of the local hospital – Newham General (pictured) – which is in the Parish. As we began to talk to TELCO members in different denominations and faiths, it became clear this was a concern across the whole community.



“TELCO focuses on winnable campaigns. The aim of community organising is to mobilise people who are usually excluded from the political process. If your usual experience is exclusion, you become disheartened and apathetic, and you become even less included, even less powerful. TELCO seeks to reverse this vicious circle. Its campaigns give people an experience of action leading to change. It starts small, but as people get more engaged, it builds the capacity and power to act on bigger issues.

“So our campaigning began with the signposting at the hospital. On that sort of issue, we could make a small but tangible change. Of course, Newham General’s problems went far, far deeper. The low pay of contracted-out staff had a big impact on morale and productivity. Also, the number of undocumented migrants in the borough led the hospital to be funded for fewer people than used it.

“Through these small-scale wins, London Citizens has grown to the point where they can deal with these bigger issues. The [Living Wage Campaign](#) is ensuring a better deal for low-paid workers – and employers in all sectors say it is leading to better productivity. The [Strangers into Citizens](#) campaign asks for a one-off amnesty for undocumented migrants – relieving their plight, and making sure everyone in the community wins, as places like Newham General are funded for the number of people that actually live in the area!

“At the same time as we were getting involved in TELCO, the parish was beginning a monthly evening service of Prayers for Healing and Wholeness. The same people were often involved in both activities – seeing each as a vital part of the church’s healing ministry.”

**For other Citizen Organising stories see**

St Matthews Brixton and the Living Wage Campaign

St John at Hackney - Local Accountability Assembly

[The above stories, and an overview of London Citizens, are available as pdfs on the PEN website](#)

St Paul’s Shadwell – Acting together with faith

[This story is told in a video with Revd Adam Atkinson and Ghazal Tipu](#)