

## **2026 Bishop's Lent Appeal: Vale Silves Community Centre, Portugal**

### **About Portugal**

Portugal is a beautiful country and a popular tourist and retirement destination. Despite the many tourists, about 2.2 million people (about 20% of the population), are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. From 2011 through to 2015 Portugal endured a financial crisis and the pandemic has contributed to the difficulties in overcoming this. Great economic and social inequalities exist.



### **About the Vale Silves Community Centre**

The Centre was founded in 1990 by Dra Maria Armanda Silva, originally as a Parents' Association seeking to improve the local primary school. That small initiative grew into a wider community project addressing the needs of families in the district. Over the years, through EU grants, donated building materials, and significant personal sacrifice—including Dra Armanda taking out a mortgage on her own home—the Centre has become a fully operational, independent, non-political, not-for-profit organisation serving the parish of Boliqueime, in the Algarve.

### **Our long-standing partnership**

St Vincent's Chaplaincy Algarve has cooperated closely with the Centre for many years. Our partnership includes supporting the elderly outreach programme, providing annual Christmas gift bags for all elderly users and their carers, assisting with fundraising, and maintaining a regular pastoral presence. This long and trusted relationship means we have had the privilege of witnessing first-hand, the commitment, integrity, and compassion with which Dra Armanda and her team serve the most vulnerable in the community.

## What the Vale Silves Community Centre does

The Centre provides essential support to vulnerable families, children, and the elderly in the region as a practical outworking of their vision to love God and neighbour:

- **Elderly Home-Care Programme** – 50 elderly people receive personalised daily care, including hygiene assistance, meals, house cleaning, and regular home visits from a team of 20 carers. Many are bedbound and entirely dependent on this service.
- **Food Support** – A large food bank operates three times a week, providing vital supplies to families living with significant hardship.
- **Children's Services** – Childcare for working parents, cooked meals for school children, and access to recreational and developmental activities.
- **Community Outreach** – Distribution of recycled clothing and furniture, laundry services, exercise classes, and case-by-case practical support when urgent needs arise.



*Christmas present distribution*



*Bishop Robert with Dra Armanda*

## Why This Appeal Matters

Despite doing extraordinary work with whole families, from the youngest to the oldest, the Centre's finances are fragile. The Centre can offer home-care support for the elderly by charging only a small fee for the service. That fee is covered partly through government allowances and partly by the service users themselves. However, because many of them live on extremely low state pensions, they are often left with no more than €60 to cover all their remaining needs, including food and medication.

The care they receive from the Centre is invaluable — without it, they would never be able to afford any form of private home care. At the same time, the small contributions they make do not come close to covering the real cost of providing the service. This means the Centre must rely heavily on donations in order to continue offering this essential support to some of the most vulnerable people in the parish. Dra Amanda is a practising Catholic - a little lady with a big and infectious faith. I find their work inspiring, and there is no doubt that additional support received from this Lent Appeal would make a significant impact.

## Use of Lent Appeal Funds

Contributions from the Lent Appeal would directly help to:

- Sustain the elderly home-care programme

- Ensure meals for children and continued food bank provision
- Strengthen outreach to isolated and housebound elderly people
- Provide flexibility to respond to urgent and unforeseen needs.

I encourage us all to give generously and prayerfully to this work. Details of how to do that can be found below.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

*+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe*

**+Robert Gibraltar in Europe**

## **How you can donate to the Bishop in Europe's Lent Appeal 2026:**

**Via your Chaplaincy Treasurer** to Nick Wraight in the Diocesan Office

### **By cheque made out to: Diocese in Europe**

Diocese in Europe Board of Finance

14, Tufton St

London SW1P 3QZ

(Please add the words "Lent Appeal 2026" to any note you send with the cheque)

### **By bank transfer:**

Account number: 40317039

Sort code: 20-06-13

IBAN: GB16 BUKB 2006 1340 3170 39 Swift

/ BIC: BUKBGB22

**On the Diocese in Europe Just Giving page:**

<https://www.justgiving.com/diocese-ineurope>