



PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE 11th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 12/13 JUNE 2021

I will take a shoot and plant it myself...it will sprout branches and bear fruit.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am delighted to welcome you back to church, as the pandemic restrictions are easing, if you have recently returned. With all the hardships we have endured over the last year, we are learning to deepen our trust in God's loving care and to respond in ways that express our care for each other.

Even though our church buildings haven't been fully open, the communal life of our Church has continued. I have seen wonderful work from so many people across the Archdiocese. People have continued to witness - stepping forward to support foodbanks, or to make PPE, helping to keep our churches open by becoming stewards or simply checking their neighbours' wellbeing. In such difficult times you have risen to the challenge, sacrificing your time and energy to serve others.

We are now making a fresh beginning in a very different setting. Following Pentecost, we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide and inspire us as we build-up the Body of Christ. The pandemic has focused our minds on our faith and on the role our churches play in society. We now have a fresh opportunity to make sure the Gospel is heard and seen through the example of our daily Christian lives.

I invite you today to reflect on what we have learned about our faith during this time. For my part, I have very much missed being able to visit you in the parishes and schools of the Archdiocese. At the same time, it has been a blessing to spend the whole liturgical year as part of the Cathedral community at St Chad's and to keep in touch through the live-streaming service.

I wonder what you may have learned about yourself and your faith in the past year? What has fanned the flames of your faith? What will you do differently in future?

The present moment offers an opportunity to focus on renewal here in our Archdiocese – being open to change. I want us to look at how we can each respond to God’s call to be missionary disciples in the Church and in our local communities, working joyfully together to spread the Word and undertake the work of God. How are we to unfold God’s plan for our Church?

Our vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

Pope Francis has recently announced that every diocese will be asked to consult the People of God in preparation for the Synod of Bishops in 2023. That consultation is due to begin in October this year. Over the coming weeks, we want to begin a dialogue with you about how we fulfil our diocesan vision, and how each one of us can use the charisms given to us through baptism to play our part.

To prepare the way for this dialogue I invite you to think about the four essential aspects of our diocesan mission:

Evangelisation – Encouraging others to know God’s love for them by inviting them to church, to pray and to encounter Christ – inviting them to parish groups where they can learn about Our Lord - helping to form missionary disciples and missionary parishes.

Formation - Nurturing future Catholic leaders in our churches and schools by providing both spiritual and pastoral formation and support – helping us to play an active role in the parish community - helping us to understand more about our faith so as to deepen our personal relationship with God.

Liturgy and Worship - Invigorating and deepening our worship and sacramental celebrations so that we share in and reflect the divine life of the Trinity - encouraging others to join us in praying to our Heavenly Father.

Social Outreach - Building up the common good through our charitable outreach - offering our time, our resources and our love to those who need them most - inviting others to join us in our charitable work.

We have all had to review our plans because of the pandemic, and now I am inviting you to join me in looking with fresh eyes at our diocesan mission. Where is the mustard seed that the Lord is asking us to plant for him? Can it take root and flourish in one of these four areas of growth?

These are the actions that I shall be taking:

I will ensure that priests, deacons, Religious and parishioners are supported to work together, so that we can share responsibility for the mission of the Church and deepen our relationship with God.

I will put the structures of the archdiocese at the service of our mission. This will begin with a re-arrangement of our deaneries, enabling us to begin a dialogue about how our parish structures can change so as to create or enhance vibrant parish communities.

I will put young people and families at the centre of our diocesan planning. Working with and through our wonderful Catholic schools, we will listen to them and actively encourage and support them to use their talents in the life of the Church and thus build even stronger relationships between our schools and parishes.

In two weeks' time some leaflets will be distributed at Mass and you will be able to find a new dedicated space on our diocesan website about the vision, together with more details of the diocesan plan to deliver it.

In July I will be inviting parishes to participate in a summer event, supported by the Archdiocese's Evangelisation group, to extend a hand of welcome to their local communities.

Next year we will be supporting parishes with more training, resources and events to help us in our mission to serve God and to enable the Church to grow – *like a mustard seed which... is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all.*

I will be praying about all that lies before us as we continue this pilgrimage of faith. I invite you to pray the vision prayer with me and to make a pledge: to pray for our Archdiocese, asking the Holy Spirit to guide us forward and to make our faith fruitful in good works.

So let us pray together:

Spirit of God,
descend on me this day.
Grant me the Spirit of joy, to lift me,
the Spirit of hope to inspire me,
the Spirit of love to surround me and
the Spirit of truth to enlighten my path.

Holy Spirit,
I pray for a new outpouring of your grace,
so that I may grow in worship of your name
in love of you in my prayer
and in my actions towards others.

Come Holy Spirit into my life to guide me.
Strengthen and defend me,
so that I may be drawn ever closer to you.
Help me this day and always
to be a channel of grace
in all I say and do
and invite others into relationship with you.

Amen

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ *Bernard Longley*

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 3 June 2021 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time (12/13 June 2021).