

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



*✠ Rt Rev Séamus Cunningham
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle*



Pastoral Letter **14th Sunday of the Year** **2 and 3 July 2016**

My Dear People

'Start off now', said Jesus to his disciples. It's good for us to remember that the disciples were actually 'sent' by Jesus. Each one of us is 'sent' by Jesus, our Church is 'sent' by Jesus. We are sent into the world to make a difference, to show how it is possible for all women and men to live in peace, to be merciful, to love and to be compassionate.

It is very important that we keep this in mind as we enter the next phase of Forward Together in Hope. Between now and Advent, we will be looking more carefully at the shape of our Diocese. Today every parishioner will be given a leaflet entitled Imagine New Way. It is introducing what every one of our parishes will do in the months to come.

You are invited to meet as parishes to explore the Observations made in your parish Response to the Questionnaire you completed last year. The emphasis during these meetings will be our diocese in the years to come, imagining a time when our Diocese will have fewer priests and people. There will always be people and priests with faith, hope, love, commitment and dedication, but we will have to rearrange our resources to ensure that our communities can flourish. These Observations are now with your parish priest and parish representative. I hope they can be made available to you.

In the months ahead, everyone will be asked to imagine the parish you're in at present developing a much closer relationship with neighbouring parishes, to begin to form a more extended 'Partnership' with these parishes. Today you're invited to take the leaflet, read it, pray about it and complete the tear off the slip asking for your suggestions about which parishes you imagine your Partnership would cover. Please return the slip to your Parish Priest or parish representative, your suggestions and reflections will be a great help in future discussions.

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When Jesus sent his disciples out in twos, he was asking them to take a great risk. 'Carry no purse, no haversack and no sandals' he told them. They were being instructed to go way beyond their comfort zone. When we are invited to imagine developing a closer relationship with a parish which may be some distance away from where we live, we too are being invited to go beyond our comfort zone. We need to do this so that the resources we have can be used to ensure that in future our worshipping communities will be viable and can flourish. We are, in fact, respecting a comment made by Pope Francis when he noted in *Evangelii Gaudium* that the parish can assume 'quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community'.

We cannot see this exercise as simply a way of reorganising a diocese. It is fundamentally about ensuring that our communities can flourish and that we do continue to grow in knowledge and love of God. Jesus reassures us that the Kingdom of God is very near, and we hear that the disciples came back rejoicing after their first engagement with the people in their own towns and villages. My hope is that as we explore how best to use the resources we have, we too will take risks, have faith in the Lord who is with us and never forget that we are to witness to Jesus in every moment of our lives.

I also hope that you will continue to keep the diocese in your prayers, each day at midday, perhaps, as suggested in your leaflet, so that we can all leave our minds and hearts open to the influence and power of the Holy Spirit.

With my very best wishes

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads '+ Séamus'. The plus sign is a simple cross, and the name 'Séamus' is written in a cursive, flowing script.

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