

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



26 January 2017

Pastoral Letter to be read in all parishes weekend of 28/29 January 2017

My Dear People

The best commentary on the 'Beatitudes' is the life of Jesus. He yearned for the fullness of life for everyone. He invited his disciples to see things differently from those around them, and in today's Gospel he identifies the kind of people who understand what his life is about. The people who are 'blessed', are those who are special people in the community. So, those people are 'special in the community' who know what it is like to live with loss and are close to those who mourn. Those people are special who know how to live with less, who don't demand privilege, who empty their hearts of violence and greed, who weep over the sufferings of others. We might say today that those people are special in the community who know that God provides what we need, those who don't seek wealth and power, who care for their sick, who spend time in prayer, who are honest and courageous. These are the people who are blessed in our world today.

I recently spent almost four days with our Diocesan Board which includes our Vicar General, Episcopal Vicars and lay people, listening to and exploring the wide range of topics emerging from our Forward Together in Hope programme. We had a room set aside for Exposition and private prayer throughout our meeting and we began each day with the Divine Office and the celebration of Mass.

We reminded ourselves that the fundamental question over the last two and a half years has been: 'How do we become more committed disciples of Jesus?' In the words of today's Gospel: 'How do we become blessed, special people, in the community?' We spent many hours looking at issues arising from your questionnaires and observations as well as all the Partnerships Proposals submitted from across the Diocese. We heard what you said about young people, worship, leadership the need to care for our priests and to support small communities. We recognised with gratitude the huge amount of work done by people in your communities for completing the proposals on time. That is a great credit to everyone involved.

I now want to tell you how you will be able to hear about some of the decisions made following all our thinking and praying.

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I have asked for arrangements to be made for 2 separate meetings to take place simultaneously in different parts of the Diocese on the evening of 9th February. At these meetings, there will be information about the new Partnerships across the Diocese and how they fit together. You will hear of the principles we used to guide us in making the decisions and be given reasons for any changes to the proposal submitted from each area.

A map of the Diocese showing all the Partnerships with the names of the communities in each one will be made available to everyone present at the end of the meeting. The Forward Together in Hope Team will facilitate the meeting and present the proposals. I will be present at one and Fr Martin Stempczyk, our Vicar General, will attend the other. Our Episcopal Vicars and other available Directors will join us to show that it is an extremely important Diocesan event. All of the information shared at the meeting will be available throughout the Diocese via the website the following day.

The Forward Together in Hope Team will also share information about what will be made available before Easter to help every Catholic appreciate a little more how working in partnership can benefit everyone in the Diocese. We all know that as the number of priests and people decline and the number of Sunday Masses is reduced in our Diocese, we need to plan ahead and ensure that communities can flourish in the future. I believe that the benefits of the new partnerships will include: a strong emphasis on lay leadership, exploring opportunities for worship, support for smaller communities and renewed opportunities for deepening our commitment as disciples of Jesus. I foresee a much more imaginative sharing of resources within partnerships as we seek to become missionary communities in a flourishing Diocese.

I was very impressed by the huge amount of work that was done by all our communities before Advent last year and I hope that those involved in helping to prepare your proposals will be able to continue to help bring them to fruition.

I encourage you all to try to attend one of the two meetings at 7.30 pm at either: The Lancastrian Suite, Lancaster Road, Dunston, or Carmel College, The Headlands, Darlington, on 9th February and I look forward to supporting you all as we move Forward Together in Hope. I ask you to pray for our Diocese in the weeks to come as we seek to explore this new way of witnessing to Jesus in our Diocese.

Thank you and God bless.



✘ Rt Rev Seamus Cunningham
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle

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