

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



Pastoral Letter for Pentecost Sunday to be read in all parishes on the weekend of 19th & 20th May

My Dear People

On Pentecost Sunday we traditionally celebrate the birth of the church. On this day we think about how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus. It marked the birth of a missionary people, empowered by the Spirit to share their faith with others. From this small beginning the church quickly grew as people witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus and deepened their commitment to him.

In the early church the followers of Jesus faced many difficulties, even persecution. As believers they put their trust in the Lord. Likewise today we are asked to trust in the presence of the risen Jesus in our lives and journey with Him. The Holy Spirit always ensures that the followers of Jesus have the necessary gifts for the building up of the church in every era.

It is almost one year since we formally established the 18 partnerships that together make up our Diocese. I think it is timely to pause and reflect upon the journey that we have travelled so far. I want to thank each one of you for the contribution that you are making to ensure that your own partnership is built on really strong foundations. Our partnerships offer our Diocese unlimited potential as we seek to ensure viable and flourishing communities of people who want to deepen their commitment to Jesus and witness to Him in our world.

I have described a partnership as 'a group of parishes agreeing to work together, to share resources, both human and material, to become stronger and better equipped for furthering the Kingdom of God'. I know that this isn't straightforward. It requires deep prayer, real determination and on-going commitment. I am encouraged to hear of all types of activities, both spiritual and social, that are helping to establish our partnerships on a firm footing.

I would like to thank particularly the Partnership Deans, lay Chairs and members of the Partnership Development Groups for the enormous investment of their time, energy and creativity. I am also very aware that many more people are furthering God's work through their quiet contributions to their parishes and partnerships. Thank you for all you are doing.

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I firmly believe that parishes co-operating and working ever more closely together in partnerships is the right direction for our Diocese. So I ask every priest to engage fully with their partnership and I ask every parishioner to support and encourage your priests in their work.

With the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit we have achieved a lot over the last year. Each partnership now has a Partnership Development Group made up of representatives from each of the parishes in the partnership. Some groups are already putting together elements of their Partnership Development Plan.

Another sign of co-operation will be the forthcoming joint meeting of the Council of Priests, the Council of Laity and the Youth Council on 7th July. I ask you to pray that this will be an inspiring and fruitful gathering.

Of course there is still much to be done and many challenges lie ahead. When preparing your Partnership Development Plans I urge you to give a high priority to formation, engaging young people and to ensuring that prayer is the starting point for all that you do.

Later in the year each partnership will also be asked to carry out a Property and Community Review to offer proposals for our potential future needs. These are important tasks for our Diocese and your on-going involvement, support and prayers are very much appreciated.

Let us take encouragement from the words of Pope Francis when he says;

'God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond'. (GE#135).

May the Holy Spirit continue to guide, inspire and enlighten us all as we seek to continue the mission Jesus entrusted to us.

With my very best wishes



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(You might like to make available copies of the new Partnership prayer for all to pray together at this point).

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