

# DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



## **Pastoral Letter for 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year - Weekend of 17<sup>th</sup> / 18<sup>th</sup> July 2010**

My dear people,

During today's Mass, you may find your mind wanders a little. You may be distracted by something about your family or friends, or maybe questions about your faith and the Church. In today's Gospel, Jesus saw that Martha was distracted. He also knows what distracts us. Jesus says that Martha's sister, Mary, chose the better part. She was moved to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him. Jesus invites us to focus on our need and to learn that what He gives us is what we need to receive. Jesus is inviting us in the same way to explore our needs as a Diocese. What do we do well? How could we do better, and what resources do we need? Jesus invites us to explore our needs and hand them over to Him with faith and trust.

Over the past months, I have been pondering these questions personally, and with my Episcopal Council. On 19<sup>th</sup> June, a further consultation was held in Washington, attended by three hundred laity, clergy and religious from across the Diocese. The meeting looked at three priorities for the renewal of our Diocese over the next 3 years. These priorities are: spiritual development, formation for all, and new structures.

Our first priority is spiritual development. In today's Gospel, Mary reminds us that what matters is to be close to Jesus and to listen to him. All we do must be rooted in our friendship with Jesus. Unless we listen to Him, we will fail. Jesus tells us that 'without me you can do nothing' (John 15:15). We are to become more Christ-centred, with Jesus at the heart of the joys and hopes of our Diocese. We must know Him better in prayer, in the Scriptures, and in the celebration of the Sacraments, especially Mass. We learn how to trust him through silent prayer.

Our second priority is formation for all, which means empowering people, clergy and religious together for the work Jesus calls us to do. This will enable us to grow in our knowledge of the Lord and His Church, and to understand how to pass on the faith to others. As we develop spiritually and together in faith, we will be better equipped to use what the Lord gives us.

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Our third priority is new structures. If we truly trust in Jesus, we will not panic, or look back with nostalgia to what seemed to be the Church's golden age. Jesus calls us to faith in Him now; to work well with the resources He gives us to be the Church of today. Decisions will continue to be made about Mass times, buildings and parishes. If we are centred on the Lord, we will make these decisions confidently and not out of fear for ourselves. We will progress together, celebrating the unique vocation the Lord has given to each person. We will be able to let go to achieve something greater. St Paul reminds us today that each of us must become a servant of the Church, responsible for delivering God's message to all. (Col 1: 24-28)

I am a great believer in consultation, and a process of consultation will continue throughout the Diocese, asking the Lord to show us what He wants from us. We will listen with great respect to one another, not trying to correct those we disagree with, but listen carefully to what is said. We must be grateful for the past, but also penitent for past failings, and hopeful for the future. St Paul tells us: 'Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.' (Phil 3:13-14) So, consultation is the name of the game. We are all in this together, and I said that long before our new Prime Minister did!

What can you do? Talk about the consultation and the priorities with your family and fellow parishioners. Further details are available on the diocesan web site. Talk to your parish pastoral committee or another parish group. Above all, keep our Diocese and our future together in your prayers. We must entrust every step of the way to the Lord's guidance, so that we follow with faith and trust where he leads us for the future.

God bless you.

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