

# DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



## Pastoral Letter

**To be read in all Parishes on weekend of 28<sup>th</sup> / 29<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

**Sixth Sunday of Easter Year A**

My Dear People

In preparation for the "Welcome Back" Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> June, Pentecost Sunday, when we invite Catholics who have drifted away from the church to take another look.

All of us have stood on a station platform or an airport concourse to say goodbye and wave someone off. It may have been a family member or close friend and while we are happy for them, their going is tinged with sadness because we will miss them even if they are just going for a short while.

All of us will have been moved to see members of the Armed Forces welcomed home by their loved ones as they return from a tour of duty in Afghanistan, transforming the arrival tarmac into a place of joy, relief and welcome. No doubt all of us have been able to welcome back family and friends as we have stood in airports and stations, docksides and bus platforms.

Places of departures and arrivals are fascinating; here we see an important part of life played out, and the wave, embrace and tear shed, witness to ties of love, friendship and family.

Jesus in the Gospel today prepares his disciples for a departure and an arrival. He must return to the Father but they will not be left orphaned. The Advocate will come to be with them forever, bringing them truth and understanding. They will be through the spirit's presence united with Jesus and the Father. All that was promised to the disciples then, is realised in us today, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate.

As a diocese we are preparing to Welcome Back Catholics to take another look at their faith. We know that while some people leave the church for very definite reasons, the vast majority simply drift away and feel that no-one seems to have asked where are they. We want to tell them "we miss you and your faith and the community of faith has much to offer you". I am grateful to those who have been on the training mornings to help co-ordinate the ministries of Welcome and Befriending and for all of you who are helping to build on the welcome and the readiness to support, that already exists in your parishes, so

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**Bishop's House, East Denton Hall, 800 West Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE5 2BJ**

Tel: +44 (0) 191 228 0003 Fax: +44 (0) 191 274 0432 Email: [office@rcdhn.org.uk](mailto:office@rcdhn.org.uk)  
Charity No: 235686

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that returning Catholics experience a warm non judgemental welcome to our parishes and the necessary help to take another look at their faith.

Philip, in our first reading should be an inspiration to us. While many wrote off the Samaritans he proclaimed Christ to them and they welcomed the message. St Peter in our second reading tells us to always have our answer ready for those who ask you the reason for your hope.

Our faith brings us hope through the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We are loved by the Father and Jesus shows himself to us. This is too good to keep to ourselves, so take that invitation out to someone you know who has drifted away from the church, encourage them to come with you to Mass on Pentecost Sunday and take another look. Assure them of a welcome, understanding and support.

On Pentecost Sunday, the great birthday of the church, we hope that we will have flung open wide our churches in Welcome and friendship.

With best wishes

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