

# DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



7 May 2015

## **Pastoral Letter - Ascension Weekend 16<sup>th</sup> / 17<sup>th</sup> May**

My dear people,

If you are going away on a family holiday, a weekend break or a business trip, the hardest thing is not packing all you will need to take with you but leaving everything ready to tick over in your absence. You spend time leaving clear instructions for those looking after everything and try to second guess every problem and difficulty that may occur and somehow put things in place to prevent it. It's an impossible task so that as you are leaving you feel at times exhausted and wondering if it would be simpler to stay at home!

Today we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord; that Jesus was taken up into heaven and there at the right hand of God He takes His place. By returning to the Father Jesus was not distancing himself from us but as our mediator assuring us that where He has gone we are to follow. Before Jesus goes he wants to put everything in place and so showing Himself to the disciples He gives them His final instruction "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation". This is the final command of Jesus to his disciples and to us the disciples of Jesus today.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis, in a sermon earlier this year, made the all important point that "there are two ways of thinking and having faith: we can fear to lose the saved and we can want to save the lost". "God" he tells us "is about mercy and reinstatement, turning evil to good, condemnation into salvation and exclusion into proclamation". We are about going out and proclaiming the Good News and not preservation at any cost.

This is at the heart of our diocesan journey of renewal 'forward together in hope' and next week, Pentecost Sunday, we move into the next phase of this journey. Every Parish community will receive a questionnaire enabling us to look carefully at ourselves and see how we are fulfilling the Command of the Lord to "Go out into the world and proclaim the good news" both as individuals and as a community.

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Alongside this, and very much part of it, is an ecumenical initiative 'The Joy of the Gospel' which has been prepared by the Diocesan Evangelisation team in partnership with Durham Cathedral and Diocese. Two years ago we saw the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation 'The Joy of the Gospel' that challenges us to "Go out to the whole world!" Also that year many people visited the Lindisfarne Gospels when they were in Durham and we had a wonderful celebration in Durham Cathedral as part of the Year of Faith. I asked you in Durham Cathedral to be the living pages of the Gospel by your witness of life. I am therefore asking you to prepare for a celebration of 'The Joy of the Gospel' and a commissioning in Durham Cathedral on the feast of the translation of St Cuthbert, Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September. To prepare for this there is a booklet with a series of reflections on different people in the Scriptures who took up the challenge to witness to Jesus by their lives and to reach out to others. I would encourage you to use these reflections and to invite our brothers and sisters from other churches to join you so that together we can take up the challenge to go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News.

With best wishes

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