



# DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE

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



March 2012

## **Pastoral Letter - Diocesan Festival to be read out in all parishes on weekend of 14<sup>th</sup> / 15<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

My dear people

I am writing to invite you to our first Diocesan Festival which will take place at the Diocesan Youth Village from Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June until Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012. This is an opportunity for us, as a diocesan family, to gather together to celebrate our faith so as to strengthen and renew us as authentic witnesses to Christ.

For a number of years now, pupils from our diocesan secondary schools have gathered at the two day schools' festival camp run by our Diocesan Youth Ministry Team. Last year, over 600 young people gathered and there were many life-changing faith experiences and powerful encounters.

We would like to offer similar opportunities to the people from our parishes and so are organising our very own Diocesan Festival which will be open to people of all ages from around our diocese. We are all on a faith journey together and need one another as we move forward. This is an opportunity to share together a profound faith experience.

Pope Benedict has called us all to celebrate a 'Year of Faith' beginning in October this year. He tells us that this 'will be a moment of grace and commitment to a more complete conversion to God, to strengthen our faith in Him and proclaim Him with joy to the people of our time.' Our Festival – which begins on the Feast of the two great apostles, Peter and Paul – will lead us into the Year of Faith and will take as its theme: 'Go with joy in your heart and make disciples of the whole world'.

A faith that is joyful and meaningful is also a faith that gives an authentic witness. In the world in which we live we are aware that many are searching for meaning and purpose. We hope that this festival will allow us all to grow in our own personal faith so that it may fill us with that deep joy which will draw others to experience a deep and authentic encounter with Christ.

This event will explore all aspects of our faith and help us discover new insights for our own personal walk with God; it will also help us to support others alongside whom we journey both within our community of faith and beyond it. as well as different experiences of prayer, liturgy and worship.

The event will start on the evening of Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June at 8pm (there will be a Mass at 7pm for those who have been unable to attend Mass for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul). Icons of some of the Northern Saints are being painted and will be blessed and processed with the Blessed Sacrament to a place where adoration will take place throughout the Festival. On Saturday, there

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will be a number of keynote addresses, workshops, seminars and opportunities for formal and informal sharing. We will hear from John Battle, a former MP who continues to be inspired by his Catholic faith and active in community organising and social justice. We will also be joined by Philip Roderick, who founded the Quiet Garden and Hidden Houses of Prayer movements which many of you will have heard about during the Deanery Spirituality Weekends. During the lunch break, there will be a "marketplace" of resources and short drop-in workshops looking at things ranging from Rainbows – bereavement support for children and young people and ideas for evangelisation. In the afternoon, there will be workshops for adults and activities for children (aged 5+) with the day ending with a liturgy and social. There will be another keynote address on Sunday morning followed by a Festival Mass at which I will preside.

The Festival will be open to people who want to camp, book a room at the Diocesan Youth Village or just come as a day visitor. In order to make sure that no one is excluded the actual Festival will be offered free apart from a small administration fee when booking, and a collection will be taken at the event to cover the costs.

I would like you to take this letter as my personal invitation to you and your family and friends to come to the Festival that promises to inspire and challenge us, motivate and encourage us and bring us to a place where we can encounter the Christ we follow in humility and integrity, with passion and energy. More information and booking forms are now available in your parish and I would encourage you to take this wonderful opportunity and to do it now as the numbers are limited due to the facilities at the Village.

I take this opportunity to thank you for all you do to allow the presence of Christ to be seen in the communities in which we live.

With my very best wishes

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