



**PASTORAL LETTER**  
**OF**  
**THE MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY**  
**ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM**  
**FOR THE 26<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**  
**27/28 SEPTEMBER 2014**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

*Be united in your convictions and united in your love.*

The beautiful hymn of praise in St Paul's Letter to the Philippians reminds us that *Christ Jesus... did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself...and became as men are*. This insight echoes the teaching of St John that *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son*. God's love for the world, with all its imperfections, compels Him to reach out in love through His beloved Son to every generation - and Our Lord has called us to take our share in that mission.

Pope Francis frequently reminds us that the way of Christ is to come close to those in need, not to offer His teaching from afar. He wants us also to draw close to those who need to hear the Gospel today and to feel its impact in their lives. Following the Lord's instruction to the apostles we too must *put out into the deep* (Luke 5:4) and take the initiative in seeking out the lost, the stray and the needy.

That is why I want to reflect with you today on the social mission of the Church. Central to the practise of our Christian faith is the Lord's *new commandment...Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also must love one another*. (John 13:34) At the final judgment we hope to hear: *I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me..... I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me*. (Matthew 25:35-40)

This recognition of loving-kindness and mercy moves the Christian heart to respond with enthusiasm and generosity to the bidding of Christ. Here in the Archdiocese of Birmingham we are blessed that so many from our Catholic community are already involved in organised good works in the name of Christ. We are encouraged in our response to the New Evangelization to witness more confidently and more publicly to our Catholic faith in Jesus Christ, but the Letter of St James warns us that *faith without good deeds is useless*. (2:20)

These good works are abundantly present in so many places and in conjunction with many of our Christian brothers and sisters. The Archdiocese and Father Hudson's Society have recently undertaken research to build a picture of the good work being undertaken across our two hundred and twenty parishes and this has identified over six hundred projects with Catholic involvement involving over three thousand volunteers and more than 300 paid staff.

Now I am pleased to announce the launch of *Caritas-Archdiocese of Birmingham* as a network of organisations, individuals and parishes involved in social action within the Archdiocese, supporting and encouraging each other through prayer and reflecting on the Church's social teaching. Our diocesan *Caritas* will offer a forum for sharing experience and expertise and identifying opportunities to work together or to discover new ways to meet the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our local communities.

This autumn a new series of Parish Visitations is beginning. Every year, for the next six years, one deanery in each of the three pastoral areas will be visited by myself or one of the auxiliary bishops. As well as gaining a better understanding of the reality of parish life today we want to focus during this cycle of visitations on the Church's social mission as an essential expression of the Church's life and mission. We particularly want to meet those who are furthering the Church's mission to evangelize by engaging in different kinds of social outreach activity as an expression of their faith.

As the Visitations begin I shall inaugurate *Caritas-Archdiocese of Birmingham* on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October at 5:00pm at St Chad's Cathedral and I do hope that many of you will be able to join me on this occasion, especially if you are involved or interested in Catholic social action.

Today we are praying especially for the forthcoming Synod of Bishops on the theme: *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the context of the New Evangelization* and we pray for Cardinal Vincent who will represent the Church in England and Wales at the Synod. It is good at this time to keep in mind the many projects across the Archdiocese that offer practical support to children and families as an expression of Christian faith and love. Many of these are sponsored or delivered by Father Hudson's Society, our diocesan social care agency, in partnership with parishes, schools and Religious communities.

My letter today also coincides with the diocesan Annual Collection to support the work of Father Hudson's Society. Many of you will know of their wonderful work with children for over 100 years and their involvement with projects such as *Brushstrokes* in Smethwick, *Anawim* in Balsall Heath, Birmingham, the *Hope Family Project* in Heathtown, Wolverhampton and their very valued family support workers in over 30 of our Catholic Schools from Oxfordshire to Staffordshire. In the true spirit of *Caritas* they are working with nine parishes in the Potteries to set up parish-based projects to alleviate loneliness and isolation amongst elderly residents there.

We are blessed that as a diocesan family we are able to respond generously and effectively to the appeal Our Lord makes and in so doing we take His Good News ever more fruitfully out into the world. *For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.* May this focus on the needs of others for the love of Christ always keep us *united in our convictions and united in our love.*

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Bernard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠Bernard Longley  
Archbishop of Birmingham