

PASTORAL LETTER – 11TH Sunday in Ordinary Time

12/13 June 2021

I will take a shoot and plant it myself...it will sprout branches and bear fruit.

Hello, I am Archbishop Bernard

I am delighted to be able to speak to you at school this morning. With the easing of lockdown we are able to spend time with our friends and it is wonderful to have seen schools getting back to somewhere near normal. Our young people have faced real challenges in the last year, yet we are learning to deepen our trust in God's loving care and to respond in ways that express our care for each other.

Even though our schools haven't been fully open, and we have had to spend a lot of time apart from our friends, the community of our Churches and schools has continued. I have seen wonderful work from so many of our schools across the Archdiocese. Students have continued to witness to their faith - stepping forward to support foodbanks, or to make PPE, fundraising, and checking on their neighbours' wellbeing. In such difficult times you have risen to the challenge, sacrificing your time and energy to serve others.

We are now making a fresh beginning in a very different setting. Following Pentecost we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide and inspire us as we build-up the Body of Christ. The pandemic has focused our minds on our faith and on the role we play in society. We have a fresh opportunity to make sure the Gospel is heard and seen through the example of our daily Christian lives.

I invite you today to reflect on what we have learned about our faith during this time. For my part, I have very much missed being able to visit you in your schools and your parishes, though I am still inspired by the way your school communities have responded to the pandemic.

I wonder what you may have learned about yourself and your faith in the past year? What will you do differently in future?

The present moment offers an opportunity to focus on renewal here in our schools and parishes across the Archdiocese – what can we change? I want us to look at how we can each respond to God's call to be missionary disciples in the Church and in our local communities, working joyfully together to spread the Word and undertake the work of God. How can we unfold God's plan for our Church, school and community?

We, at the Archdiocese, have a vision in which we want our young people to play an active part. Our vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

Over the coming weeks, we want to begin a dialogue with you about how we fulfil this vision, and how each one of us can use the talents given to us through baptism to play our part.

To prepare the way for this I would encourage you to think about the things you care passionately about and would like to see more of in our schools and church communities:

This may be through continuing or doing more of the many charitable activities started during lockdown.

It could be using your skills in IT to teach and support less confident members of the community, perhaps even the parish priest!

You may want to think about starting a school or community climate emergency group to promote the Living Simply initiative.

It might be as simple as inviting friends to join you at mass on Sunday.

Perhaps you would like to start a new parish group or social activity, lead, or support one of the existing parish groups or offer to read at Mass.

The pandemic may have increased your interest in your faith, made you think differently and you want to explore how you can deepen your faith.

We have all had to review our plans because of the pandemic, and now I am inviting you to join me in looking with fresh eyes at our diocesan mission. Where is the mustard seed that the Lord is asking us to plant for him? Where can you help it flourish and take growth?

These are the actions that I shall be taking:

I will ensure that priests, deacons, Religious and lay faithful are supported to work together, so that we can share responsibility for the mission of the Church and deepen our relationship with God.

I will put young people and families at the centre of our diocesan planning. Working with and through our wonderful Catholic schools, we will listen to them and actively encourage and support them to use their talents in the life of the Church and build even stronger relationships between our schools and parishes.

I will ensure the archdiocese pro-actively responds to the climate emergency and listens to the concerns of our young people and families.

In two weeks' time, some leaflets will be distributed at Mass and in your schools, perhaps you could share these leaflets with your parents, and ask them if they have heard this message at church.

In July I will be inviting parishes to participate in a summer event, supported by the Archdiocese's Evangelisation group, to extend a hand of welcome to their local communities.

Next year we will be supporting parishes and schools with more training, resources and events to help us in our mission to serve God and to enable the Church to grow – *like a mustard seed which...is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all.*

I will be praying about all that lies before us as we continue this pilgrimage of faith. I invite you to pray the vision prayer with me and to make a pledge: to pray for our Archdiocese, asking the Holy Spirit to guide us forward and to make our faith fruitful in good works.

So let us pray together:

Spirit of God,
descend on me this day.

Grant me the Spirit of joy, to lift me,
the Spirit of hope to inspire me,
the Spirit of love to surround me and
the Spirit of truth to enlighten my path.

Holy Spirit,
I pray for a new outpouring of your grace,
so that I may grow in worship of your name
in love of you in my prayer
and in my actions towards others.

Come Holy Spirit into my life to guide me.
Strengthen and defend me,
so that I may be drawn ever closer to you.
Help me this day and always
to be a channel of grace
in all I say and do
and invite others into relationship with you.

Amen