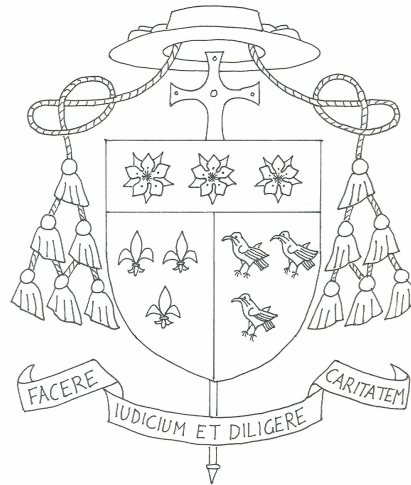


DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON



PASTORAL LETTER

December 2008

Solemnity of the Holy Family

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I wonder what you were given for Christmas? I received my first Christmas present almost a month early!

I went to see our local rugby team, the Saints, play against Bath. I happened to be sitting next to three young people whom I had confirmed. It was great to see them, but it was bitterly cold. By half-time I was frozen to the bone. One of the youngsters bought some chips. Even though he had smothered them in tomato ketchup, I was hoping that he might offer me one or two. Sure enough, he reached out and shared them round. Those chips were a welcome first Christmas present.

On Christmas Day we celebrated God reaching out to us, putting his trust in us again with the gift of his Son, Jesus, born of Mary in Bethlehem. Jesus is his gift to heal us and to bring us hope.

God has always put his trust in human beings, in you and in me. In the first place, he has given us this wonderful world. More and more of us are recognising that we are stewards of our world, and we are trying to be more responsible about our environment. The proper care of our world is vital for life.

But so, too, are good relationships – in our homes and in our neighbourhoods where we are a mix of different nationalities, cultures, traditions and religions. If we have a care for our natural environment, we must also work hard in the area of our relationships, in the environment of our hearts - on how we get on with one another.

On this Feast of the Holy Family we focus on the relationships of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Central to their life and their love is their total attentiveness to the will of the Father. In today's Gospel, Mary and Joseph, faithful to the law of Moses, bring Jesus to the Temple to consecrate him to God. Then we hear how they returned home to Nazareth and how Jesus "grew to maturity, and was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him."

Central to our lives, too, must be attentiveness to the will of the Father. Only then can we grow in maturity, wisdom and God's favour. Only then can we walk humbly with our God.

"Walking humbly with our God" is the theme for our Diocesan family beginning in 2009. I am hoping that clergy and people, our parishes and our schools, will work more closely together. For that purpose I would like us to create groupings of Parishes smaller than the current deaneries.

In every parish I visit, I thank and encourage you all in your life and mission. And I would like to repeat those words of thanks and encouragement in this Pastoral Letter. So much goes on in every parish. For example, it was wonderful to visit a parish recently and then bump into some of the parishioners again at a Prison which they visit regularly.

Just as our priests are increasingly helping each other out across the parishes, so I am hoping that neighbouring parishes will work together more, sharing their gifts and talents, especially in the area of understanding our faith, being formed in our faith, and passing on our faith.

Over the coming months you will hear more about "Walking humbly with our God" and how you can engage with this movement based on confidence, conversation and connections around our Diocese.

I am sure that it will involve some challenge to change. And change is always difficult. But what a change in life was demanded of Mary and Joseph to bring Christ into the world.

Please pray that, like the Holy Family, our Diocesan family may be attentive to and respond to the will of our Father in heaven. May God grant you unwavering faith, constant hope, and love that endures to the end.

With every blessing for 2009,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Peter". The plus sign is on the left, and the name "Peter" is written in a cursive style to its right.

Bishop of Northampton

To be read and/or made available at all Masses celebrated in the Diocese of Northampton on the Feast of the Holy Family – 27/28 December 2008.