



BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES STATEMENT

'HEART SPEAKS UNTO HEART'

The Response of the Catholic Bishops' of England and Wales to the Visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom

19 NOVEMBER 2010

At our meeting we have reflected deeply on the recent Apostolic Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom. We offer our thanks to God who blessed the days of the Visit in answer to countless prayers. For so many people these were days of joy, of celebration and of the public expression of faith in God, especially the Christian faith.

We are profoundly grateful to the Holy Father for all he said and did, indeed for his very presence, here in our countries. We express our thanks to Her Majesty the Queen for the invitation extended to His Holiness and for the gracious and personal welcome she gave to him. We thank all who helped to ensure that the Apostolic Visit unfolded smoothly, especially HM Government and Local Authorities, members of the Civil Service, the Police and all other public services. We are most grateful to Lord Patten of Barnes who led this effort as the personal representative of the Prime Minister. We thank all who worked so hard from within the Catholic community, especially the staff of the Bishops' Conference and the diocesan Papal Visit teams.

Central to the message of Pope Benedict was the insistence that religion has a key part to play in our society and that all people of faith have an important and necessary contribution to make to the common good. We have reflected on this and are taking steps to act on the encouragement we have been given.

We also make our own and echo the Holy Father's heartfelt expressions of shame, sorrow and apology with regard to "the immense suffering caused by the abuse of children especially within the Church and by her ministers". We willingly repeat our own apologies and renew our dedication to the work of care towards the young and of safeguarding them and vulnerable adults.

We are grateful to the Holy Father for the time he spent meeting survivors of abuse. This emphasises again for us the importance of the response and care we offer to those who have suffered abuse as children. Through our National Catholic Safeguarding Commission we are working with survivors to fashion a 'Care Pathway' to guide the Church in this task.

We are also grateful to the Holy Father for meeting with a representative group of safeguarding professionals from within the Catholic community. He acknowledged that we "have taken serious steps to remedy this situation, to ensure that children are effectively protected from harm and to deal properly and transparently with allegations when they arise". We thank him for this encouragement and for the invitation to share the lessons we have learned with the wider community.

We have also reflected on the situation of our priests who have often borne the brunt of public criticism and scorn. We thank them for their perseverance and rejoice that the Visit of Pope Benedict has been a source of such joy and affirmation for them.

This Visit has given us new confidence. It has also helped to give fresh impetus to our identity as Catholics, as experienced by ourselves and as seen by others. We wish to strengthen this identity, which is rooted in the gift of faith and which is the well-spring of so much generosity.

We thank the Holy Father for encouraging us to continue working for the full visible unity of the Church while preparing for the establishment of an Ordinariate.

We thank also the Holy Father for his emphasis on the immense value of Catholic education. We appreciate the achievements of our schools and colleges and share their commitment to the constant search for excellence. We will celebrate this in the 'Year of Catholic Education' .

At the heart of this endeavour is the person of Jesus Christ, for in Him we glimpse the fullness of life and love for which we strive. In relationship with Him we receive the love, strength and forgiveness we need.

The Holy Father's constant call to holiness continues to echo loudly within us. It is a call we will continue to explore and expound in the months to come. Indeed this is the heart of faith to be lived in every home, in every marriage, in every true friendship, in every school, place of work, and through the dedicated lives of Religious men and women.

We gladly acknowledge the call of the Holy Father that we are "to proclaim the Gospel afresh in a highly secularised environment" , and renew our dedication to our prophetic mission, highlighting the needs of the poor and disadvantaged throughout the world. We are grateful to all who respond generously to these needs, especially through our agencies CAFOD and MISSIO. We commit ourselves to this work and to the care of the earth's fragile environments.

We are taking action to strengthen our role and contribution in working against poverty here at home and the role the Catholic Church can play in creating a culture of social responsibility in our society.

Finally, we thank the Holy Father for giving us Blessed John Henry Newman as a special model of faithful discipleship for the United Kingdom. The richness of his life and witness is still to be explored by many. We know that in him we have a person whose integrity was beyond reproach, whose search for truth continues to inspire many and whose commitment to the practical, pastoral care of the poor remains a hallmark for us all.