

**RITE OF ELECTION**  
**22 FEBRUARY 2015**

*These are the commandments, the laws and customs...in the land you are going to  
make your own.*

Today the Catholic Church extends an embrace of welcome to all the catechumens and those preparing to be received into full communion this Easter. I also thank your sponsors and the parish clergy and catechists who have assisted you on your journey to this moment. You have come together to St Chad's Cathedral, the Mother Church of our diocese, for this moment of election as we begin the season of Lent. At the conclusion of these forty days of Lent, as we celebrate Easter, you will receive the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, taking a full part in the Easter mysteries that renew the life of the Church year by year.

Today's ceremony marks a turning point in your journey of faith when you are ready to make a solemn commitment to continue on the pathway that has been chosen for you by the Lord himself. The Church also prepares herself for the impact upon her life that your arrival as Catholics is going to make to your own parish communities and to the community of the diocese at large. You have come from all parts of the Archdiocese and your presence reminds us of the Holy Spirit at work in so many different settings.

At the outset of Lent we have begun a pilgrimage of faith and repentance together and this pilgrimage is the final stage of preparation for each of you. It is a very special Lent, the last forty days during which you hold back from receiving the Lord in Holy Communion when you are present at Mass. This represents a spiritual fast for each one of you as you long to be united with Christ in the Eucharist.

Lent is also a journey of repentance -- an opportunity for every Catholic to repent of our sins and make a firm purpose of amendment. Your experience of conversion has already been along the pathway of repentance leading towards a renewal of life. In this you reflect the pattern of Lent as we accompany our Lord in his forty days in the desert, searching for a deeper understanding of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord today.

Even before the formal, sacramental moment when you become members of the Catholic Church, at the end of Lent, your lives have already been touched by the love of Christ and you have heard him beckoning you to be at his side in the desert. You have also been inspired by the example of others who have been following the Lord for some time in their parish communities. Some of them are with you here today, together with your sponsors who will accompany and support you.

You are already united with all of us in a special way as we begin our Lenten pilgrimage, above all through our recommitment to the three ways that we try to deepen our faith in this season. You are already taking up the weapons of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, and the Gospel of this celebration has placed before us the one prayer that holds all Christians close to the prayer of Christ himself. Today we hear him say again to us: *Say this when you pray: Our Father in heaven...*

The pathway you are walking is one of holiness and it leads towards perfect holiness in the Kingdom of God. That holiness bears fruit in our relationships with others as we bring the gifts of peace, truthfulness, justice and integrity into our daily dealings with one another. Holiness is sustained through the scriptures and the sacraments and we continue to encounter Christ through these precious gifts.

The Catholic Church embraces you today and your lives are to reflect what it means to be catholic. You will be part of a universal family of believers held together by Christ through the faith we proclaim, the sacraments we celebrate and the pastors who guide us. In this celebration we sense our communion with our supreme pastor Pope Francis, whose words of encouragement I offer you now:

*Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each communities and every believer. Above all it is a "time of grace". God does not ask of us anything that he himself has not first given us. "We love because he first has loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). He is not aloof from us. Each one of us has a place in his heart. He knows us by name, he cares for us and he seeks us out whenever we turn away from him. He is interested in each of us; his love does not allow him to be indifferent to what happens to us.*