



PASTORAL LETTER
OF
THE MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
10/11 DECEMBER 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

As we continue our journey through Advent on this Gaudete Sunday we hear St John the Baptist questioning the Lord about his identity and mission. He asked: *Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?* When he was questioned about his credentials in this way, the evidence Jesus provided lay in his acts of kindness and healing: the blind see again; the lame walk again; the dead are raised to life. These are signs of the powerful presence of God's Kingdom and Advent encourages us to look for the coming of God's Kingdom today. And to consider our legacy from the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

In our Archdiocese we are blessed to have Father Hudson's Care working to establish the justice and peace of God's Kingdom. I think that if John the Baptist were to send a messenger to question those who work for Father Hudson's Care today, they would provide evidence of their co-operation in the Lord's work helping the disabled to live more fully again, those who have dementia to have their dignity again, vulnerable children to be cared for again, the asylum seeker, the homeless and those involved in crime to be part of society again. In Christ the dead are raised to life again, and it can truly be said that those who felt that they were dying through loneliness, rejection or failure are helped to live again. Most of all on this Gaudete Sunday, when we are told the tongues of the dumb shall sing for joy, the mission of those who work for Father Hudson's is to bring joy to places where there may be pain and suffering.

Many of you will know of the work of Father Hudson's Care and your support for them in parishes and in the Catholic schools of our Diocese has been vital. Some of you will know of their support for the elderly in St Joseph's Care Home in Coleshill and in community projects around the Diocese – Brushstrokes, Young at Heart, Hope, New Heights, Maryvale and Anawim. Eight of our own diocesan priests are a welcome presence in St Joseph's, after having served many years in their parishes, and your own relatives or friends may also have lived in their community of care.

The families of those who have profound physical and learning disabilities, who need constant care, have valued the opportunity for their child to live in the St Catherine's Bungalows or come to St Catherine's Day Service. I recently witnessed an inspiring day organised by Sister Gillian Murphy for the families of children and young people who have disabilities, from all around the Diocese, which took place in the Day Centre in Coleshill.

Many of you will know of the wonderful New Routes fostering service and the Family Support in Schools' service in some 30 schools across the Archdiocese, where the original vision of Father George Hudson continues to be lived out.

What you may not know is that Father Hudson's Care has not been standing still. Encouraged by Pope Francis and by the Archdiocese and driven by its own Trustees' vision, it is continuing to respond to new needs in new places and has a desire to express the compassion of Jesus Christ wherever and whenever possible.

Only a year ago it opened St Vincent's House – ten apartments in Coleshill to provide independent living opportunities for individuals with moderate learning difficulties. This July, Fatima House was opened in a nine-bedroomed former presbytery in central Birmingham, to provide accommodation for destitute asylum-seeking women who have fled conflict – and in January 2017, a new project in Worcester Deanery, known as Embrace, will reach out to those older people who are desperately lonely and very isolated.

Any of you who have walked through our urban areas will have noticed the increasing numbers of homeless people sleeping rough on the streets. In April 2017, after nearly two years of preparation, Father Hudson's aims to open Tabor House, an emergency night shelter for up to 20 men and women who have nowhere to lay their head.

These new projects are only possible because of Father Hudson's collaborative work with like-minded organisations and individuals: the Columban Missionaries, the St Vincent de Paul Society, Housing Justice, local parishes, compassionate priests, inspiring individuals, generous businessmen and women and statutory agencies who value working with the Church.

Another legacy, though much more hidden because of the confidential nature of its work, is to be found in the work of the Origins Service at Father Hudson's. This year I hope that a number of our parishes will want to dedicate their Christmas crib collection to the work of Origins. Origins is a service for those who were once in care at Father Hudson's or who were adopted through Father Hudson's. It helps individuals and families who are seeking to understand their past and often to reunite and there is a full account of this work in the November edition of Catholic Today, our diocesan newspaper.

This Gaudete Sunday, as we welcome Christ especially in those most in need and as we consider what the lasting legacy of the Jubilee year of Mercy will be, I want to encourage you to support Father Hudson's work. During the Year of Mercy, Caritas Archdiocese of Birmingham, working with Father Hudson's as the social care agency of the Archdiocese and with other agencies, has established these new projects as a true legacy of the mercy of Christ. This is a cause of great joy for us as, with Isaiah, we say: *the lame shall leap like a deer, the eyes of the blind shall be opened... The Lord your God is coming ... He is coming to save you.*

May the Son of God fill you with joy as you prepare to celebrate his birth, and may I wish you the blessing of a very happy Christmas to come.

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 7 December 2016 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on 10/11 December 2016