



**PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, 2/3 MAY 2020**

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, dear friends,

We are living through the strangest and most unsettling of times together. None of us has ever experienced a Holy Week and Easter quite like this year's as the coronavirus took hold across our communities. I know that many of you have been anxious about your family members and friends who have been ill and our prayers are with those who have suffered bereavements in recent days. We pray that all those who have died will see the light on the face of the risen Christ.

Over recent weeks we have had to modify our way of life and our way of faith for the wellbeing and safety of one another and this has inevitably changed the way that we practise our faith day by day. I realise what a burden it is not to be able to visit your parish church or to receive the sacraments, but this sacrifice is contributing to the good of others.

As we continue our journey through the Easter season today's Gospel offers us consolation and encouragement just when it is most needed. Today is Good Shepherd Sunday – the moment in Eastertide when we hear the risen Christ calling us as our shepherd: *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* This year more than ever we need to hear the voice of the shepherd calling us forward – to be carried on his shoulders so that as his flock we may gain fresh strength and purpose.

Our Lord calls us to be watchful and attentive as the sheep of his flock, to recognise and love the sound of his voice. When the Lord calls us it is more than a beckoning – it is a vocation, a calling to be his disciples and to do his bidding. On Good Shepherd Sunday we pray for an increase of vocations within the Church – vocations to married life, to Religious and consecrated life, to the ordained ministries.

I would ask you to pray especially today for those in formation for the Permanent Diaconate and for the Priesthood. It will be a great blessing this year to ordain three of those who are currently in formation as Permanent Deacons and I know how much they will bring to the parish and chaplaincy communities they are looking forward to serving.

This summer we shall welcome our three newly-ordained priests at the conclusion of their studies and formation in Rome. I am also looking forward to ordaining four of our eleven current seminarians as priests. During the coronavirus pandemic all our seminarians have been stationed in parishes across the Archdiocese. I thank the clergy and the parishioners who have kindly made them so welcome during this unexpected pastoral placement. I also thank all the seminary staff who have continued to support them in their formation.

Priests and deacons witness and work in close collaboration with all the lay faithful, recognising and grateful for the wide range of charisms they have received from the Holy Spirit. The Church's life is enriched by the different vocations that come from the Good Shepherd. We have all been touched over recent weeks by the dedicated work of doctors, nurses and care-workers and I am grateful for the healthcare chaplains and volunteers who support them.

I am also grateful to those whose vocation finds its fulfilment in education. Thanks to our teachers and governing bodies, very many of our Catholic Schools have remained open, providing a vital local service for children and their families through their outreach work and care. Children and staff have been making food parcels and seeing them delivered to families and foodbanks. Some schools have been making PPE equipment for local hospitals and NHS workers or delivering hand-painted cards to lonely parishioners.

There are others whose vocation from the Good Shepherd lies in social outreach, making the Church's social teaching alive and active in our local communities. Father Hudson's Care supports the work of several agencies across the Archdiocese, making a real difference to those in need during the current pandemic.

In Birmingham Tabor House usually provides emergency night-shelter for those who have been sleeping rough on the streets of the city. It is currently helping the City Council to staff a crisis centre in a central hotel providing accommodation for over fifty people. In Smethwick the Brushstrokes centre has remained open, thanks to staff and volunteers. Last week it provided food for over two hundred destitute people, either delivered to their homes or safely collected from the centre. You will know of other good examples in your own neighbourhood.

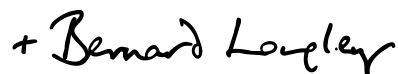
In these difficult days I recognise the wonderful and courageous witness of those who work in our Care Homes and I ask your prayers for the six Catholic Care Homes in the Archdiocese. They have come face to face with the coronavirus and they have offered the consoling touch of the Good Shepherd to those who are sick and recovering, as well as those on their final journey to the Lord.

Many of us would have been preparing during the month of May for our annual diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. The experience of Lourdes has sparked or fostered many a vocation. This year I shall celebrate a special Lourdes Mass to be live-streamed from St Chad's Cathedral on the afternoon of Sunday 24 May, the Seventh Sunday of Easter when our pilgrimage was due to begin.

In all of these different settings the ministry of deacons and priests is greatly valued as they represent the Good Shepherd himself. On this special day of prayer for vocations, please pray for those in formation for ordained ministries at our seminaries and currently in our parishes. Pray also for those hearing or reading this who are aware of the calling of the Good Shepherd, that they may have courage and find in Christ the confidence they need to offer their whole lives to him.

Dear friends, we also pray for one another as we continue the journey in company with the risen Christ and always encouraged by his promise to us: *I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard Longley". 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 1 May 2020 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on 2/3 May 2020