



**PASTORAL LETTER**  
**OF**  
**THE MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY**  
**ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM**  
**FOR THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**  
**10/11 OCTOBER 2015**

*Everything is uncovered and open to the eyes of God.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This Sunday's Gospel story about the *man of great wealth* may be a familiar passage to us but it never fails to make its point with fresh significance whenever we hear it. This year we are listening to St Mark's Gospel at a remarkable moment in the life of the Church, while the Synod of Bishops meets in Rome to reflect on marriage and family life and during our time of preparation for the forthcoming Jubilee Year of Mercy.

It is also a moment when world events throw out a challenge to all the followers of Jesus Christ. Faced with the desperate needs of the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing Syria and other troubled parts of the world, what is the Christian response? With the current political focus on migration, how should we respond to the newcomer in our midst, confident that we are doing the will of God?

Our Lord's invitation to the *man of great wealth* is direct and radical: *Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor.* How do we translate that into the circumstances of our own lives, knowing that we are not trying to be less than wholehearted in responding generously to the Lord's beckoning?

The way we respond to the refugee crisis offers an opportunity to bear witness to our faith in Christ. It can demonstrate our acceptance of the Lord's teaching and our commitment to act together as members of his body the Church for the common good. This is what Pope Francis is challenging us to do at this moment of global turmoil when so many people have been forced leave their homelands.

*Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions.* This is how Pope Francis referred to present situation during his recent visit to the United States of America. He has never been afraid to challenge the Church and the world to recognise the responsibilities we share as children of God for the well-being of one another.

While our attention has been focused on the incoming Syrian refugees, we need also to remember the many asylum seekers and refugees who are already in our Archdiocese and who experience great need.

One of our agencies, seeking to alleviate this need and to befriend the stranger, is St Chad's Sanctuary which lies just behind the Cathedral in Birmingham and immediately opposite Archbishop's House. During September St Chad's Sanctuary supported more than two thousand asylum seekers, offering food and clothing, language classes and advise about accommodation and other practical needs, and above all the warmth of friendship and the recognition of their human dignity.

There are several other Catholic agencies, based in parish premises or supported by our parishes, which have been doing tremendous work in supporting asylum seekers and refugees for many years. These include *Brushstrokes* in Smethwick, the *Hope Community Project* in Wolverhampton, the Birmingham Churches Together ecumenical agency *Restore* and the *Welcome Group* in Solihull. The Columban Fathers, together with their lay communities, the Saint John of God Brothers in Wolverhampton and the Passionist Fathers have practised hospitality and made their homes available to those in need – and I am sure you will know of other wonderful agencies to the north and the south of our Archdiocese.

Like the *man of great wealth* we have received a very personal challenge from Pope Francis. He has made it personal by asking every parish to welcome one refugee family. Taken literally, this may be difficult for all sorts of reasons. However, there are helpful ways in which every parish and every parishioner can respond to this challenge.

We can be proud of the generosity of our Catholic parishes over the years in responding to those who are in need. In order to channel the current surge of charity and compassion I have asked Caritas Archdiocese of Birmingham to co-ordinate our response. They have begun by listening to the organisations which I mentioned earlier to ensure that what we do is guided by the Wisdom of God through the insights and experience of those who serve the Lord in this way.

Father Hudson's Care has offered to be a single point of contact for this vital work, receiving any enquiries or offers of assistance for our brothers and sisters in need. They will be happy to respond, whenever possible, to any questions you may have. I have asked for their contact details to be made available to you this weekend, together with a **sheet of additional information** touching upon the themes of **welcoming and befriending, providing accommodation, offering our skills, taking up a special collection before the end of November and organising a collection of non-perishable foods.**

We have been called by the Holy Father as Catholics to care for those in need out of love for Christ, hearing our Lord's words addressed to us: *in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.* May the Lord bless you for your generous response and for the prayers that you have so readily offered for all those in need. In these ways we can respond to the constant calling of the Lord: *Come, follow me.*

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 symbol at the beginning.

✠Bernard Longley  
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 9 October 2015 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on 10/11 October 2015