



## DECLAN BISHOP OF CLIFTON

### Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family 2020

The birth of a child usually brings joy to a family – to parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters. A new life has been born and perhaps many people will wonder what this child will turn out to be. The birth of the new child proclaims that the family has a future.

As the child grows up, he or she comes to know the story and the traditions of the family. The child begins to take on an identity and contributes to family life. It is within the Christian family that the child first comes to know and live the Christian faith. The family is indeed the domestic Church. Parents are the first teachers of their children. What is important to parents becomes important to the child even though later as a teenager he or she may question or challenge the beliefs of the parents. Within the family we should know how to say thank you, not taking one another for granted. We should have a profound respect for each other and learn to say 'forgive me' when we have hurt another family member.

What is true of our family life is also true of the life of the Holy Family. They like all families had to face some harsh realities of life as well as celebrating the joys. They knew what it was to leave their homeland and become refugees. They knew the challenges of daily life; they knew the necessity of work and the importance of putting food on the table; they knew the death of a parent and the gap that this can bring in family life especially in a society where women and children were often vulnerable. Through his family, Jesus as a human being, learnt the story of his family and the wider family of Israel, called to be God's people. In the Gospel today we are told that Jesus grew to maturity and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

When parents bring their children to be baptised, they are introducing them to the wider community of the Church. In the waters of Baptism the child is immersed into the life of the Trinity and also the life and mission of the Church. In Baptism we recognise every other human being as our brother and sister and we are called to share in the mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God sent by the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In time we begin to understand more fully what this means. The Holy Spirit empowers us to be missionary disciples sharing in the ministry of Jesus to reconcile the world to God, to one another and to the whole of creation.

The Gospel has been entrusted to us. However, there are times when that trust is broken and there is deep hurt experienced by members of the Church. In a shocking way children and vulnerable adults have been abused by those in whom they put their trust. Their lives have been damaged which can have lifelong consequences. To anyone who has been abused, I say 'I am deeply sorry', and I am willing to see anyone who may so wish.

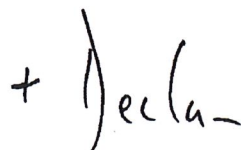
The Bishops of England and Wales have promised to do everything to make the Church a community where there is no fear, where people can trust one another and where children, young people and vulnerable adults can find a safe place to flourish and mature into the person God lovingly wants them to be.

Over the years families change. People move away for work and enter into new relationships; people die and others are born. The family of the Church also changes adapting to new circumstances into which to proclaim the Gospel and at the same time being faithful to the person of Jesus Christ. Change is not easy, and it can mean sacrifice. In a period of change knowing one's identity can provide firm foundations on which to build the future. Next June on the Diocesan Family Day we will be celebrating the life of our Diocese and planning for the future. One of the circumstances to take into account is the fact that in three years' time it is estimated there will be only 44 Diocesan Priests under the age of 75. We need to look at the consequences of this in a positive way.

In preparation for the Diocesan day, I would suggest that each parish community looks at its history and has a parish exhibition telling the story of the community. These parish stories can be brought to the Diocesan day to enrich the wider family of the Diocese.

During this Octave of Christmas, I wish you a joyful time and pray that as a Diocesan family God's face may shine upon us during 2021.

With my best wishes and prayers

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Declan" with a stylized initial "D" and a cross-like mark above it.

Rt Rev Declan Lang  
Bishop of Clifton

To be read and made available in all Churches and Chapels  
in the Clifton Diocese on the Feast of the Holy Family, 26/27 December 2020.  
This pastoral letter is also available from our website [cliftondiocese.com](http://cliftondiocese.com)