

**Pastoral Letter of the
Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Nottingham
appointed to be read at all Masses
on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
Saturday 10 / Sunday 11 January 2015**

Dear friends in Christ,

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Season of Christmas. Our annual celebration of the Lord's Birth speaks of the power of love and the importance of our families to us. It is at Christmas that we make an effort to send cards to people who are important to us; we buy presents for our families and friends; we decorate our homes, offices and churches; and we can travel large distances to be with the people whom we love most.

Today's Feast reminds us of the beginning of Jesus' mission, and so our thoughts turn to how we are going to live the Christian life in 2015. Jesus, the Redeemer of all people, has given us the sacrament of Baptism so that we can partake in his mission as Prophet, Priest and King. We share in his prophetic mission by proclaiming his law of love and his Gospel of peace in everything we say and do; his priestly mission by celebrating Mass, receiving the sacraments and living lives of prayer each and every day; and his kingly mission by glorifying the Lord in our lives, serving our brothers and sisters, and by the little acts of kindness which can make our world a much happier place.

It is in Baptism that we are given our fundamental vocation as Christians – to be Christ in the world in which we live, 'for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church'. That vocation is lived out in different ways and at different stages of our lives, but it is never lived in isolation. We are all members of parishes, schools and chaplaincies – and, even more importantly, we

are all born into families, 'domestic churches', in which the Christian life is lived, day in, day out.

Our family is not something that happens by chance; like anything else, we need to put effort into our families, otherwise we will drift apart. As husbands, wives, children, parents, brothers, sisters, grandchildren, grandparents and relatives, we are asked to love, nurture and care for each other, especially the most vulnerable members of our families.

At the very heart of this vision of the family is the gift of marriage; in the sacrament of marriage, God gives Christian husbands and wives the grace which they need to be faithful 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health', loving and cherishing each other for the whole of their lives. The unity and indissolubility of marriage remind us of God's love for us, a love that is total, unconditional and everlasting; in Christ, God has made 'a new and eternal covenant' with us, and that covenant is reflected in the love of husband and wife. Furthermore, all children are gifts from God, and when a couple welcomes the gift of a child, their love for each other becomes a sign to their children, family and friends of God's creative work.

However, the vocation of marriage is not an easy one, and we all know and experience in many different ways the challenges which married couples and their families can face. Next October, Bishops from throughout the world will meet together with Pope Francis to reflect on the vocation and mission of the family today. To do this properly, the Pope has asked for the help of all members of the Church; at the close of the last assembly of the Synod of Bishops, he said:

Dear brothers and sisters, now we still have one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront; to give answers to the many discouragements that surround and suffocate families.

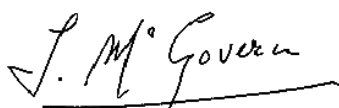
Discernment is not the sharing of opinions, but reflection upon God's will for us, and seeking to put it into action in our daily lives. The 'spiritual discernment' which the Pope invites us to make – as individuals, families, parishes and communities – will play an important part in the Church's continuing reading of the Sacred Scriptures and the Apostolic Tradition so that she can discern God's will and proclaim it afresh in each new generation, and so support married couples and families in their vocation; the Church is a hope-filled voice in a world that needs her message more than ever.

To help us, the Bishops of England and Wales have produced a leaflet, *The Call, the Journey and the Mission*, which invites all of us to reflect on the gift of marriage and family life. It is available from your parish today and is downloadable from the diocesan website. It gives us some prayers, reflections and questions to think about; we can do this alone, with our spouse, within our families, with friends or in our wider community.

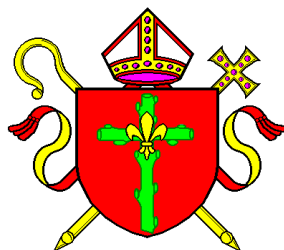
Our discernment here in the Diocese of Nottingham and elsewhere will help the Holy Father and his fellow Bishops in their discernment, so that they will have a real awareness from people throughout the world of the joys, hopes, difficulties and sorrow which many feel as they seek to live their marital commitment and support their family.

I hope that, during this New Year, we will all be able to reflect on the vocation of marriage and family life, discerning God's will for us, our families and our communities. May the Lord accompany us and guide us in this journey for the glory of his name.

With my prayers and every good wish for you and your families for a happy and peaceful New Year,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. McGovern". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Rev Mgr Canon Thomas McGovern Prot Ap
Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Nottingham



**Bishop's House
Nottingham**

January 2015