



**Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Nottingham
appointed to be read at all Masses
celebrated on the Fifth Sunday of Easter
Saturday 23 / Sunday 24 April 2016**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

‘Just as I have loved you,
you also must love one another.
By this love you have for one another,
everyone will know that you are my disciples.’ (*John 13: 34-35*)

Loving others, as Christ loves us, is the very heart of Christian discipleship, and it was the example of love in action that led to the amazing growth of the Church in her earliest days. Daily life in the Roman Empire, in which Jesus and the Apostles lived, was often harsh and brutal, and sociologists have discovered that it was primarily the more caring and humane way of life of the early Christians, which made such an impression upon the wider society, that attracted many people to Christianity. It was the Christian love and fellowship that was extended to the vulnerable, children, slaves, foreigners and the sick, and the respect shown to women, that led to many becoming Christians. Christian selflessness in the face of plagues and sickness, and the practical care Christians showed to each other, were compelling factors which drew many people to faith in Jesus Christ.

The Church recognises and upholds the dignity of every human person, and invites us to create and maintain a safe environment for everyone, responding sensitively and compassionately to the needs of others, especially children and adults at risk. Internationally, the Catholic Church is one of the world’s biggest providers of education, healthcare and social services - running schools and hospitals in some of the most deprived parts of the world. Locally, the safeguarding of the welfare of our children and of adults at risk is a duty incumbent on all of us. We can all play our part

in showing care and concern, not only for the more vulnerable members of our parishes but also for those in our wider community.

On this Safeguarding Sunday, I would like, especially, to thank the members of our Safeguarding Commission, our Safeguarding Co-ordinator and all our parish Safeguarding Representatives for their good work on behalf of all of us. They have a particular role to play in helping to ensure that all who exercise ministry with children and adults at risk have appropriate training and support, so that they in turn can care for those whom they serve. Just as in our families we should nurture and care for one another, so we should do the same in the family of God, the Church, and therefore I am grateful for everything each of you does.

Today, I also want to speak about another aspect of the Church's duty to help safeguard all people who may be at risk. Human Trafficking is defined by the United Nations as 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat, use of force or other means of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of abuse of power [...] or of receiving and giving of payment to a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation'. It now ranks as the second most profitable worldwide criminal enterprise, after the illegal arms trade. The International Labour Organisation estimates that 2.4 million people are trafficked globally, at any given time, with annual profits generated from trafficking in human beings being as high as £17 billion. The UK is a destination country for human trafficking, and victims come here from countries such as Albania, Vietnam, Nigeria, Romania, Poland, Eritrea, China, Slovakia, and Sudan.

It is easy to think that human trafficking, that this kind of modern slavery, happens elsewhere, but not where I live. Let me tell you about 'Maria'. That is not her real name, but I shall call her 'Maria'. She is a vulnerable young woman in her twenties. She was born with a cleft palate, which affected her speech, and she has significant learning difficulties. In January last year, police called at an address in Nottingham. Inside, they found 'Maria'. She was malnourished, frail, very distressed, and appeared to be in pain. It was later discovered that she had a fractured rib and wrist, as well as bruising, as a result of regular beatings. The only clothes she possessed were those she was wearing: a thin vest, tracksuit top, and a pair of men's jeans held up by a shoelace in place of a belt; no socks, just trainers.

'Maria' was eventually able to explain how she had been held captive at the house for the previous three months, where she had been made to work for the couple who lived there with their two children. She was, in effect, kept as an unpaid domestic slave, who was forced to sleep on the floor with no bedclothes. If she upset the couple or did anything they perceived to be wrong she was made to sleep outside where the dogs slept. Not only did she receive no pay, but the state benefits she

received were stolen from her and paid into the couple's account. Her mobile phone was taken from her to prevent her contacting anyone, and she was denied access to Facebook and other forms of social media. She was assaulted regularly, not only by the couple but also by one of their male friends who was a regular visitor to the house. All three eventually pleaded guilty to a number of charges of assault, theft, false imprisonment, and forced or compulsory labour, and were sent to prison. This took place within our Diocese, within Nottingham!

Popes St John Paul II, Benedict, and Francis have in recent years continually drawn the attention of the Church and the wider society to this now widespread exploitation of human beings. In May 2012, the Vatican hosted an international conference on combating human trafficking. It was organised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, and brought Catholics into a dialogue with police and prosecution authorities from around the world to develop a new partnership using the Church's world-wide networks. This work was continued by a second international conference in 2014, chaired by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, which resulted in the establishment of the 'Santa Marta Group', a partnership of Bishops and law enforcement officials which now has membership in thirty-six countries, including the United Kingdom. It also met in London, later that same year, at the invitation of the British Government.

Parliament passed the Modern Slavery Act in 2015, which saw an Anti-Slavery Commissioner being appointed in England & Wales. His role is to help ensure that more victims of modern slavery are identified and referred for appropriate support, and that that human traffickers and slave masters are prosecuted and convicted. In June 2015, 'Caritas Bakhita House' was opened in London; run by religious sisters, it provides short-term initial shelter and pastoral and practical help to female victims of human trafficking.

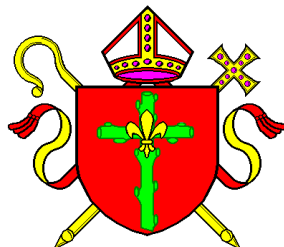
So that we can begin to become more sensitive to potential victims of trafficking and other exploited and vulnerable individuals living in our midst, it is my intention to hold training days in parts of the Diocese so that we can learn more about what Pope Francis has called 'an open wound on the body of contemporary society'. If you would like to be involved in helping to shape a diocesan response to this global evil, as part of our safeguarding care, please do get in contact with your parish priest or deacon. If you would like to find out more about modern slavery, please go to the resources section of the diocesan Year of Mercy website: www.bemerciful.co.uk.

Above all else, please pray for an end to human trafficking and modern slavery.

Please keep me in your prayers, and know that you and your loved ones are in mine.

+ Patrick

Rt Rev Patrick McKinney
Bishop of Nottingham



**Bishop's House
Nottingham**

April 2016