

**Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney
Bishop of Nottingham**

**Pastoral Letter appointed to be read out at all Masses celebrated on
Saturday 5th October and Sunday 6th October 2019.**

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Thursday, 10th October, people around the world will mark World Homeless Day. Its purpose is to draw attention to the needs of homeless people locally, and to inspire ways in which we might respond positively to this growing phenomenon. Here in the UK 320,000 people were recorded as homeless at the end of 2018; that figure represents a rise of 13,000 on the previous year's figure. It's equivalent to 36 new people becoming homeless every day. Between 4 and 5 thousand people bed down on the streets on any given night, an increase of 160% since 2010, when World Homeless Day began. Although it's rough sleepers that we see about the towns and cities of our diocese, they are just the visible tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding the extent of the homeless crisis. At the end of 2018 78,930 households were in temporary accommodation, and so many homeless men and women never show up on official statistics; 495 homeless individuals died isolated and alone. No one chooses to be homeless. People become homeless for many different reasons including, losing a job, a breakdown in relationships, bereavement, lack of affordable housing, mental and physical health problems, and it can happen to people from all social backgrounds.

The story of Sarah, a young single mum with three young children, illustrates how easily the risk of homelessness can happen. Sarah was unexpectedly made redundant at work and so was forced to consider applying for benefits. She didn't have a computer or access to the internet, or any IT skills. So, with no job, no money, and the threat of losing her rented accommodation, Sarah began selling her few possessions so that she could buy food for her children. A Christian neighbour, seeing the mother upset, became concerned. She asked how things were and, because she was the only one who had expressed care, Sarah became tearful and shared how her family were on the verge of being evicted and that, in her attempt to feed the children, she herself was going without food. As a result of the neighbour's intervention a local Homeless charity was alerted. It helped Sarah with food, toiletries and nappies, and the online support she needed to secure housing benefits. The landlord revoked the eviction notice and, in due course, this mum was able to find new employment. It's a good news story because of the timely intervention and action of a Christian neighbour which prevented yet another case of homelessness for a family; but the reality is that too few people in this sort of situation are so fortunate.

In our diocese we are, as you know, currently exploring, in parishes, chaplaincies and schools, ways in which we can be more outward-looking, more missionary; ways of putting our faith into action in response to those ever-challenging words of Christ: 'whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do for me' (Matthew 25:40). Pope Benedict has reminded us that 'The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable'. (Deus caritas est, 25) The Church's charitable works are a response to the Word of God in the scriptures, and a living out of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is here in Mass that we encounter Christ in word and sacrament. He invites us to allow him to form us into a community of people where love of God and love of neighbour are so entwined that we strive to unite prayer with action, praise with justice, and adoration with social involvement. He is the one who calls and enables us to recognise him in others, and especially in the poor and neglected.

I believe this with all my heart, but the truth is that when faced with so many street homeless and hidden homeless I often feel very helpless and unsure what to do for the best. So, I spoke with two very committed Catholics who work for homeless charities in our diocese. These charities reach out to offer support and practical help to those who, like Sarah, are in danger of becoming homeless, so addressing the reasons why people risk become homeless, and they also offer practical support to those who are working to rebuild their lives. As a result of conversations with these very experienced people, I agreed to highlight World Homeless Day in a Pastoral Letter, and they agreed to work together to produce a bespoke dedicated website resource providing information on homelessness, as well as providing details of the charities and agencies that are working

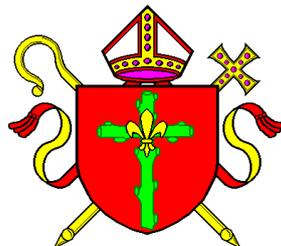
with homeless people in each of the four counties of our diocese, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.

The link to this resource has been sent to your parish or chaplaincy, and it is also available on the diocesan website. Next Thursday, World Homeless Day, I would ask of you two things. Please pray for all who are homeless, and please also begin to consider whether as a parish, or as a group within your parish, you might pledge to support, with both prayer and some practical help, a homeless agency in your area. I know there are so many demands on your kindness, and I also know how generous the people of our diocese are. However, I am more and more convinced that, with local councils experiencing cuts in their resources each year, homelessness is likely to keep on increasing. But in a rich and civilised country like this such homelessness is a disgrace. So, I would like to see more parishes and chaplaincies engaging constructively with a local homeless agency. This could be one very practical way in which we respond to Pope Francis who has declared this October 2019 as an Extraordinary month of mission, in fulfilment of Christ's challenge: 'whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do for me'

With prayer for you and for all your loved ones,

+ Patrick

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Bishop's House - Nottingham
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