



## DECLAN BISHOP OF CLIFTON

### **Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family 2014**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

When Abraham left his homeland, he did not go alone. He travelled with Sarah and probably other members of the household. They lived in expectation, as a People of Hope, awaiting the promise of a new homeland and, more especially, the gift of a child.

Mary and Joseph, with the gift of their child, Jesus, went to the Temple in Jerusalem in accordance with the Law of the Lord to present their first born child to God. The child is proclaimed by Simeon as the Light to enlighten the Pagans and the Joy of Your People Israel.

This year, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family following the Synod held last October with the theme: *"Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelisation"*. We also look ahead to the future Synod in October 2015 which will focus on *"The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World"*.

In celebrating the Feast of the Holy Family, we are first celebrating the joy of family life and the generosity of family members towards one another. At the same time, we recognise the sacrifices that are necessary and the challenges that the family have to face in their relationships.

Pope Francis, speaking about marriage, said:

*“Those who celebrate the Sacrament say, “I promise to be true to you, in joy and in sadness, in sickness and in health: I will love you and honour you all the days of my life”. At that moment, the couple does not know what will happen, nor what joys and pains await them. They are setting out, like Abraham, on a journey together. And this is what marriage is! Setting out and walking together, hand in hand, putting yourselves in the Lord’s powerful hands. Hand in hand, always and for the rest of your lives.”*

We need to prepare for journeys. This is no less true for the journey of marriage and family life. That is why it is important for couples to prepare for marriage – to give time to know one another and speak honestly about the challenges they are able to anticipate in their relationship. It is also important to have an understanding of marriage as a sacrament, a way of discipleship and the response to the call of the Lord to follow him. The family is described as the “Domestic Church” and the “School of Humanity”. The family is the place where faith is celebrated, lived and shared enabling the children to grow in faith and come to a knowledge of what it means to live the Christian life.

Within our parish communities, we need to recognise how we can best support families as they deepen their relationships and face the challenges of everyday life. We need to celebrate marriage, particularly at times of birth and special anniversaries. Perhaps it is a task for the Parish Pastoral Council to see how this can best be done.

In the journey of marriage comes the sadness of death. This can be a very lonely time, not just immediately but for some time. How do we accompany one another in this time of loss and remember those who have gone before us in their pilgrimage of faith?

Another isolated experience can be the breakdown of family life. This is when we need the friendship and prayers of one another. Wounds can cut deep and cause deep hurt to those involved – parents, children, other family members and friends.

Today we celebrate family life. In the prayer of Pope Francis we pray:

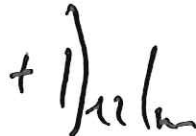
*“Holy Family of Nazareth,  
grant that our families too  
may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel  
and small domestic Churches.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
may families never again  
experience violence, rejection and division:  
may all who have been hurt or scandalised  
find ready comfort and healing.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
make us once more mindful  
of the sacredness  
and inviolability of the family,  
and its beauty in God’s plan.”*

May God bless you in this Christmas season and may God’s light shine upon you in the coming New Year.

With my best wishes and prayers

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Declan Lang', with a small cross symbol to the left.

Rt Rev Declan Lang  
Bishop of Clifton

To be read and/or made available in all  
Churches and Chapels in the Clifton Diocese  
on the Feast of the Holy Family, 27/28 December 2014.  
This pastoral letter is also available from our website  
[cliftondiocese.com](http://cliftondiocese.com)