



**PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
3/4 NOVEMBER 2018**

You must love your neighbour as yourself.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Those simple and direct words of Our Lord from today's Gospel are the benchmark for every Christian, setting the standard by which we regard and treat other people. They echo another of Christ's teachings: *Treat others as you would like them to treat you.* (Luke 6:31) Most of our sins are a breach of this commandment. These are among the realities in our lives that bring us to our knees to ask forgiveness of God and forgiveness of one another.

I want to speak to you this Sunday about an issue that is both difficult and shameful in the recent history of the Catholic Church and in the story of our own Archdiocese: the profound failure of trust that enabled children to become the victims of sexual abuse by priests and others in the Church whose sole mission should have been their care and well-being. It is essential that we reflect together on this. I am very grateful to your parish clergy for making this Pastoral Letter readily available to you – as well as for the dedicated and generous pastoral care they give to you unstintingly.

In a week's time the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) will be focussing its attention on the Archdiocese of Birmingham as a test case for the Catholic Church in England and Wales. From the moment that the Archdiocese was notified of this in 2016 we have sought to offer our full and most transparent co-operation to IICSA.

Cardinal Vincent, as our former Archbishop, and I will be called to give evidence at the IICSA public hearings taking place in London from Monday 12th until Friday 16th November. At these hearings we will have an opportunity to express our sorrow and to apologise publicly for all that has happened to the victims of abuse in this Archdiocese as well as to those for whom the Church's response to their needs and hurt has fallen short in any way.

Cardinal Vincent and I are at one in our sense of shame and sorrow. We are at one in our willingness to assist this public Inquiry and to learn from its findings how best to safeguard all in our care and to respond promptly and compassionately to those who have been abused.

We have both prepared as well as we possibly can for the forthcoming IICSA hearings. We have carefully gone over all the past events and we have paid particular attention to the experiences of victims. We have been moved by their sufferings and by the outrage they feel at the injustices they have experienced. We also recognise their courage in coming forward

to speak publicly about all that has happened to them, since doing so will undoubtedly awaken their anguish.

I realise as I speak that some of you may well have been personally affected, directly or indirectly, by these terrible crimes. As Archbishop I offer you my sincere apologies for all that you have had to endure over the years. I am profoundly sorry that in a number of cases those who suffered such abuse were not at first believed. This has surely added to the burden of pain that they and their families have carried.

It is abhorrent to me, as it must be to you, that any person, loved by God, but especially a child should have their trust undermined and their experience of life criminally violated, wherever this has happened. It is doubly offensive when such abuse is at the hands of priests or others from whom they had a right to expect only an expression of God's love and care for them. I am determined to do all that I can, within this Archdiocese and with the help of those who support me, to make the abuse of children and of those who are in vulnerable situations a thing of the past. I ask for your prayers in this.

It is important that those who have suffered abuse know that they are always welcome to speak with me and that my door remains open for whenever they may wish to be in touch. Our Safeguarding Office will make a new point of contact available from this weekend (the details of which are available on the diocesan website and in your parish newsletter). This will enable us to sign-post anyone who may prefer to speak to an independent advisory service.

Since the mid-1990s we have had clear diocesan safeguarding policies and in 2002 national safeguarding policies were introduced. These are being constantly updated. I am grateful to our diocesan Safeguarding Team and to all the Safeguarding Representatives in our parishes for ensuring that we all know and follow these policies. A safe culture is one where all are vigilant about the needs of the most vulnerable. We all have a responsibility to see that our parishes are welcoming and safe places for children. I want to reassure you that the correct thing to do about any safeguarding concerns is to report them without delay.

In preparation for IICSA, and in response to the Inquiry's recommendation, the Trustees of the Archdiocese have commissioned two independent reports. The first will help us to understand the dynamics of how this abuse has been committed in the past. The second is a review of our safeguarding procedures so that we can improve them as required.

These two reports have highlighted serious past failures and current areas requiring significant improvement in diocesan practice and we are acting promptly to put their recommendations into action. Both reports have been disclosed to IICSA and they will also be shared with other Dioceses and with our national safeguarding structures so that everyone can benefit from them.

I would like the words of Pope Francis, from the beginning of his Letter to the People of God (20th August 2018) to be the message that you take home today. The Holy Father said:

I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons. Crimes that inflict deep wounds of pain and powerlessness, primarily among the victims, but also in their family members and in the larger community of believers and nonbelievers alike. Looking

back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated. The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults.

Please pray with me for all those who have suffered abuse in our Archdiocese, that we may learn from their courageous example about the depths of God's love. And pray also that we may become more and more a Church where children and vulnerable people experience the compassionate love of Jesus Christ, who must surely have a special place in his heart for them and who said: *You must love your neighbour as yourself.*

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 31 October 2018 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on the weekend of 3/4 November 2018.