



DECLAN BISHOP OF CLIFTON

PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Christmas is a time when many families come together to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord. Members of the family can be scattered around the country or even further afield, but they are often drawn together by a strong bond which is celebrated at Christmas.

Pope Benedict XVI said 'The family is the privilege setting where every person learns to give and receive love. The family is an intermediate institution between the individuals and society and nothing can completely take its place. The family is a necessary good for peoples, an indispensable foundation for society and a great lifelong treasure for couples. It is a unique good for children to learn from their parents total and generous self-giving. The family is also a school that enables both men and women to grow to the full measure of their humanity'. The family is the basis of society and the Church.

Family life is challenged daily by demands such as work, finance, employment, ill health, trust and children but in many parts of the world family life is also threatened by violence, war and terrorism.

Many families both in Israel and Palestine have seen the destruction of family life. Parents have seen their children killed, children have seen their parents executed, homes have been destroyed and people have been displaced in large numbers. Violence breeds violence and families are often victims of such atrocities both in Israel, Palestine and other parts of the world.

There is a small Christian community in Gaza. The Holy Family Church compound in which people have taken refuge was thought to be a safe place but this proved not to be true. A sniper killed a mother and daughter who were making their way from the church to the convent within the compound. A home within the compound for profoundly disabled people was destroyed and is no longer habitable displacing 54 people. The school run by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Rosary has also been badly damaged. There are many other stories of cruel and shocking reality.

In Bethlehem there have been no public festivities this year. Christmas is being celebrated quietly. However, the message of peace is still proclaimed and urgently needed. In the midst of conflict we are called to be peacemakers placing our faith in Jesus who came to reconcile us to God, to one another and to the whole of creation. The darkness of war cannot overcome the light of Christ even though at times the darkness seems to be triumphant.

Please keep the peoples of Israel, Palestine and other parts of the world where there is war and violence in your prayers. Give support to organisations such as Friends of the Holy Land and Cafod who are providing humanitarian aid as best they can and will be instrumental in building up a new society when the war is over.

As we approach the New Year may God bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a small cross symbol followed by the name 'Declan' written in a cursive, flowing script.

Rt Rev Declan Lang
Bishop of Clifton

To be read and made available in all
Churches and Chapels in the Clifton Diocese
on the Feast of The Holy Family, 30/31 December 2023.
This pastoral letter is also available from our website
cliftondiocese.com