



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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Bishop's Letter to the Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle as read in St Mary's Cathedral on 12 December 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During this season of Advent, we are prompted to reflect upon, and prepare for, the coming of the Messiah: 'God with us'. The Church's liturgies and the readings they contain encourage us to prepare for His coming as people of hope. Advent is also a time of discernment and reflection upon God's will. A time for renewed focus. A time in which to ask ourselves: what does the Lord require of us?

In the Gospel of the Fourth Sunday of Advent we are reminded that, through the tenderness of God, we are encouraged to 'be not afraid'. As people of hope, we must be receptive to the Lord's prompting in order truly to welcome Him and His will for us. It is only by this means that we enable Him to fulfil His will in our lives. We are provided with the Icon of hope in the person of Joseph, in the vulnerability of sleep, receiving the Lord's assurance and guidance as to how he was required to act.

The Church's teachings confirm the Diocesan Bishop needs to be as Christ among the people entrusted to him. The office of bishop carries great responsibility to provide spiritual leadership and governance to the diocese. As St John Paul II observed:

'What does the Lord require of us? What does the Lord require of me?'

I have recently had need to discern and reflect upon this question for myself and the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle. Having done so, and with great sorrow and reluctance, I have concluded that the office of the Diocesan Bishop has become too great a burden and I feel I must resign from my position as your Bishop.

When, in February 2019, I was asked to accept the privilege of appointment as the 14th Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, I responded in obedience. Then, as now, I was committed to serve you as your Bishop to the best of my ability. Some of you may well have attended the service of my installation on the Feast of the Annunciation (25 March) that same year. Both the date of the installation and my Episcopal motto, *Soli Deo* (God Alone), were specifically chosen to reflect that all ministry is and must be in the service of the Gospel.

My own discernment has caused me to recognise that I now feel unable to continue serving the people of the diocese in the way that I would wish. Having undertaken this discernment process, and with due consultation with others, I indicated my wish to resign to the Holy Father and he has graciously accepted my request.

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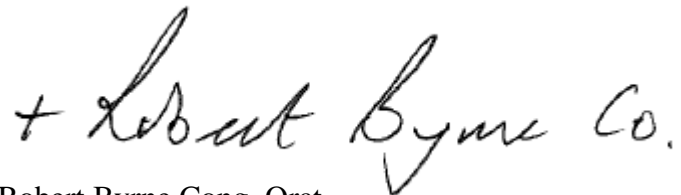
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I recognise that you will be concerned to know when my successor will be appointed. This is, of course, a matter for the Holy Father. He has asked Archbishop Malcolm McMahon to be the Apostolic Administrator who will now continue the work of the diocese, pending the nomination and appointment of my successor as Bishop.

Since my arrival in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, I have received many graces. These have included the considerable kindnesses, care, and support of so many of you. I am and will remain deeply grateful to you all for that support and the care which you have provided to me.

My resignation having been accepted; I propose to return to my Oratorian Community in Oxford. I ask for your continued prayers and provide you with an assurance of a remembrance in my own prayers.

With every good wish and blessing,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Robert Byrne Co." The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name below.

+Robert Byrne Cong. Orat.