



Bishop Stephen Wright

Pastoral Letter on The Season of Creation and Thanksgiving

14th and 15th September 2024

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The Church offers us prayer intentions throughout the year. We are in the Season of Creation, which invites us to pray and act on our call to be stewards of God's creation. This Sunday the Church invites us to reflect on the joy of sharing the Gospel. Next Sunday we are invited to pray in thanksgiving for the Harvest.

At Mass these prayer intentions are linked. As the bread and wine arrive on the Altar the first prayers said by the Priest are thanksgiving prayers for these harvested gifts from God. By the power of the Holy Spirit and through Jesus' words of Institution, Christ is present in the Eucharist. The Mass ends with Jesus sending us to spread His Good News joyfully.

Thanksgiving for the Harvest reminds us not to take our everyday food and drink for granted. Let us always be grateful in prayer. I recall harvest traditions as a primary school child, bringing in food items for distribution to the elderly in the vicinity. We know the needs in our communities have grown. Thank you for your generosity. Thank you for the foodbanks and other means of outreach run and supported by our parishes, schools and societies.

On the 4th October we will have the CAFOD Harvest Family Fast Day. Thank you for your generosity in helping our sisters and brothers in Sudan, Gaza and other nations where violence and climate change devastate lives. Being generous with those who go without food and drink is a holy way to show our prayerful thanksgiving for the Harvest.

For some, food security is now a serious threat to human flourishing. There are other crises that we all face. They are linked. Climate change and the loss of biodiversity due to human actions are the major ones. I realise some people think this has nothing to do with faith. Successive Popes strongly disagree. St. Pope John Paul II called for us all to embrace an "ecological conversion," a renewal of our relationship with creation so that we no longer see it as an object to be exploited but to cherish it as a sacred gift from our Creator. Pope Benedict XVI went further and spoke of the urgent need to recognise that creation and redemption are inseparably linked. "The Redeemer is the Creator and if we do not proclaim God in his full grandeur – as Creator and Redeemer- we also diminish the value of redemption." To not care for creation is to diminish human redemption. It was Pope Benedict who took the significant steps to use renewable energy as much as possible at the Vatican as solar panels were installed.

In this Season of Creation Pope Francis invites us to reflect on "The first fruits of hope," inspired by St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 8:19- 25. The times we live in demonstrate that we still do not relate to the Earth as a gift from our Creator, but as a resource to be exploited. "Creation groans" (Rom 8:22) because of our unsustainable actions that harm it. However, Creation teaches us that hope is present in waiting, in the expectation of a better future (cf. Rom 8:20-21).

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To hope in the biblical context does not mean to remain still and silent, but to cry out and to struggle actively for a new life in the midst of difficulties. We are called to worship and serve God as both Creator and Redeemer. The two go together just as the harvested bread and wine and the divinely made Eucharist go together at Mass. “Look upon us, O God, Creator and ruler of all things... that we may feel the working of your mercy...” says our Opening Prayer at Mass. Creation and redemption hand in hand.

There are global challenges in caring for creation. Nations must act together. That is not an excuse though for us not to take practical actions here and now in our locality. Virtue is doing right because it is right, regardless of the actions of others.

I thank our Diocesan Environmental Group and the many parish and school groups who have been reflecting on caring for our common home. I am aware that pilot projects are beginning to see how local communities can respond in practical ways, to lower carbon footprints and increase the abundance of nature in our grounds. Our diocesan website has information to help us all take these steps.

I end with two practical invitations. The first is a simple step to reduce carbon footprints. Many of our parishes are signed up to the Inter-diocesan Fuel Management (IFM), the Catholic Church’s energy procurement group, which has been running for many years now. This scheme ensures the electricity and gas used by our properties has been purchased from renewable sources. In other dioceses all parishes purchase their energy through this method. I invite all our parishes and schools to do the same. Information is online or can be received via our diocesan property or finance team.

The second invitation is for all our parishes, partnerships and schools to reflect on what practical small steps we can take to better care for our common home. One method that can be used is the Live Simply Award offered by CAFOD. There are other schemes. I know several schools and parishes have achieved or are in the process of achieving the Live Simply Award. I invite all our parishes, partnerships and schools to consider engaging in the Live Simply or a similar project. There is information online or CAFOD representatives are ready to assist. Experience shows our young people will want to be involved.

Our Opening Prayer at Mass today ends, “grant that we may serve you with all our heart.”

May we serve the Lord in caring for His creation and letting all know of His redemption by joyfully sharing the Gospel. May the Lord bless you all.

With assurances of prayers,

✠ Bishop Stephen Wright
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle