



ARCHDIOCESE OF DURBAN

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Just over sixteen years ago the Archdiocese celebrated its 150th birthday of establishment in Natal by Bishop Allard and his two Oblate Confreres. At that time we gave thanks to God for enabling us, his Church, to persevere in "Proclaiming the Good News" faithfully and effectively for a century and a half.

Celebrating 200 years of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa

This year, we celebrate 200 years of the Catholic Church's establishment to serve God and his People in the entire Southern Africa region. To help us make this celebration more than words only, I invite you to adopt as a plan of action the inspiring words spoken by Pope St John Paul II as he led the Church in celebrating the Great Jubilee of Christianity in the year 2000:

"Remember the past with gratitude; live the present with enthusiasm, and be open to the future with confidence".

These words sum up what we stand for as the Church of God. According to Pope John Paul II we should thank God for all that he has done in our own personal life, in the life of our Family, in the life of our Community and indeed, in the life of our Country! All of us have our own unique story to tell about "the great things that the Mighty One has done for us" - how he has blessed us in every stage of our growth and development; how his loving hand has guided us to make the right decisions, to do the right thing, to be strong and firm in keeping his commandments, especially his commandment of love; how he has enabled us to love Him above everything and our neighbour as much as we love ourselves, or as Jesus puts it: as much as I love you!

What are we celebrating?

This Bicentennial gives us the opportunity to thank Him for enabling us to succeed, even if imperfectly, in becoming more of a "community serving humanity", and thus removing some of the divisions and separations brought on us by colonialism and apartheid. What we achieved through trying to live the Pastoral Plan over the past 28 years, was really God helping us to strive courageously to "be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect".

To the extent that we have succeeded, we are encouraged to take up that challenge anew, as we commit ourselves to continue "proclaiming the Good News with enthusiasm".

Indeed, if I am reading the mind of the Church correctly, today she is calling us to live the present with enthusiasm by "renewing and reforming Marriage and Family Life" in such a way that we will be renewing and reforming society through these means.

Why must we renew and reform Marriage and the Family?

We must renew and reform Marriage and the Family, firstly, because Marriage and the Family are where we see God's love in action most clearly. It is in Marriage and the Family that he teaches us to love, even as we receive our parents' love and share it with our siblings, and later with our friends and relatives. Marriage and the Family are where we learn to care for others before we care for ourselves!

If we "remember the past with gratitude" we will most certainly encounter Jesus, who uses every opportunity, beginning with our life in the Family, to call us to walk with him as our dear Friend and Teacher, even before we know him as our Lord and Master!

I wonder how many still remember how at our diocesan Synod of 2007, we resolved that we would evangelise ourselves, then our Parishes, so that "together with Christ we would change the world"? Well, we have not quite completed that task. That's why as we remember with gratitude the graces God has given us in the past two hundred years, we are confident that he will help us to take up our missionary task again, to *"go make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you even to the end of time!"* (Matthew 28:19-20)

How can we carry out our mission more effectively?

My plea is that we open ourselves to the future by doing what Pope Francis and the Synods of 2014 and 2015 considered to be the most urgent task for the Church today.

They called on us to become a renewed and reformed Church, by renewing Marriage and Family life. In doing so we would be able to renew and reform society little by little until we would make the difference God wants us to make. I believe this is the best way to continue the work begun by our ancestors in the faith two hundred years ago, because they wanted us to "have life, life to the full!" (John 10:10)

"So, what shall we do then, Brothers?" (Acts 2:37)

The Adult Faith Formation Team under the leadership of our Episcopal Vicar for Faith Formation, Fr Grant Emmanuel and Ms Irene Helsdon, has produced a beautiful series of Reflection Booklets on Marriage and the Family (in both English and Zulu) to help us carry out this mission systematically and effectively. For me this is the perfect way, not simply to remember the past with gratitude, but also to build the future with confidence, because the Lord Jesus has promised that he will be with us always, even to the end of time!

Every Parish has been sent a sample pack and an order form! So, there is no reason why we cannot all play a part in making this Bicentennial a "Year of Grace and Renewal!" Secondly, you will find a Prayer for our Families at the end of this letter. Use it every day!

May God bless you all and enable you to accept and live your vocation to be a disciple seriously, whether you are Married, a Religious, a Priest or in the Single state. Wherever Christ has called you to be, make sure you continue "Proclaiming the Good News" to everyone you meet! And do it because you "remember the past with gratitude, are living the present with enthusiasm, and you are open to the future with confidence".

+ Wilfrid Cardinal Napier OFM

Archbishop of Durban

Prayer for Our Families

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendour of true love. To you we turn with childlike confidence and trust. Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and true domestic Churches. May families never again experience violence, rejection or division. May all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing in you. May what we have learned from the Synods on the Family make us value and promote Marriage & Family Life as sacred and inviolable, because they are the foundation of the Father's plan for bringing new life into the world.

Jesus, Son of Mary, have mercy on us. Mary and Joseph, pray for us.

Amen