

**Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Kevin McDonald  
for The Feast of Christ the King  
Sunday, 22 November 2009**

My dear people,

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, a feast which brings the Church's year to a close. In greeting you today, I wish to encourage you all to enter deeply into the season of Advent which begins next Sunday. It is a beautiful season which awakens fundamental emotions of hope in God and faith in the future. It is a pity that it is such a short season and so often overshadowed by the commercialisation of Christmas. But we should not allow the grace of this season to elude us. The prayers and liturgy of Advent can be a great source of strengthening and of confidence in our Christian lives.

This year, Advent falls in the Year for Priests, a year in which Pope Benedict has invited us all to pray for our priests and to meditate on the mystery of the priesthood. The Feast of Christ the King is a fitting day on which to meditate on this theme since Christ is our High Priest. He is the source and the model of all priesthood. When the priest celebrates Mass he identifies with Christ in a very special way. As he offers the bread and wine, he is united with Christ in offering his whole being to God the Father. The priest's whole life is one of self-offering to God and to God's people. It may not be an easy life but it is a graced one and I encourage you all to affirm and support your priests in any way you can. They need your support just as you need theirs. This year the Vocations Office published a leaflet inviting people to pray for a particular priest of the Diocese each day. I commend this to you. So too, do I commend the efforts being made to encourage vocations to the priesthood. If those efforts are to be fruitful however, we all need to understand and appreciate the priesthood and to recognise that the very life of the Church depends upon it. The Church is the People of God, a people which gathers for the Eucharist, the Eucharist which is celebrated by the priest. We must understand and help others to understand the special joy that is particular to the priesthood. It is a way of life whose value is incalculable and the Lord is still calling people to it. So pray for our seminarians, those who are preparing them for the priesthood, and those who are thinking about it.

At this particular time, however it is the case that we have fewer priests than we need. When we had the parish discussions for the Vision Process two years ago, this was a recurring concern and there was very fruitful discussion about collaboration and working together. In the light of those discussions, I have asked the Deanery clergy to begin to reflect together in practical ways in which we can continue to grow and develop as a Church in a situation of fewer priests. Some dioceses have already developed new structures for providing for the pastoral needs of their people in a changed situation. In a large diocese like this, the situation varies very much from place to place and it will be a long-term project. Different forms of collaboration will be suited to

different geographical areas. Some areas are more ready for change whereas in other areas it will be some time before the necessity will emerge and an appropriate response discerned. These discussions are currently looking at possibilities and in the event of significant changes being proposed you will have had the opportunity to discuss and explore the issues together as they mature. This is because changes of this kind affect us all and are the business of us all.

Finally, and most importantly, let us remember that the Feast of Christ the King is a day for young people. We all need to be aware of the danger to which young people are exposed in our towns and streets today. Let us remember all those who died young and specially those who died in tragic or difficult circumstances. We pray that their death may not be in vain and that young people will experience true friendship, a stable family life and a strong personal relationship with God. Our Catholic schools do a wonderful job in nurturing our young people. We thank God for them and ask God's blessing on their governors and teachers. I warmly greet our young people who are reading or listening to this letter. You are our blessing in the present time and our hope for the future. I invite everyone to both pray for our young people and to celebrate the contribution they make to the life of the Church. As Pope Benedict says in his message for World Youth Day 2009, young people should be "witnesses of hope". It is my personal hope that some of our young people will find that depth of faith and hope that will enable them to consider a vocation to priesthood or religious life.

To end, I return to Advent, the season that is drawing closer. Let it be a time of prayer for all of us, taking Our Lady as our model and guide. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she had no idea what the future would hold for her. Mary is a symbol of the Church and we in the Church must look to the future with confidence and hope, knowing that the Lord will provide and give us all we need to live our lives to the full.

With my blessing and my prayers,

+ Kevin

Archbishop of Southwark

Given in Southwark on  
Sunday, 1 November 2009  
The Feast of All Saints