



# CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

## THE NEW EVANGELISATION

Address: Archbishop Bernard Longley

ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL, BIRMINGHAM, 4 FEBRUARY 2012

### Welcome to Birmingham,

**I am delighted to welcome you today to this special day of prayer, reflection and information gathering under the title 'Crossing the Threshold'. I see our gathering as an important part of our diocesan preparation for the forthcoming Year of Faith.**

As you know Pope Benedict will inaugurate the *Year of Faith* in October this year during the Synod of Bishops on the theme of the New Evangelisation. The year itself will help us to recapture something of the richness of our faith as it is expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It should encourage us to re-equip ourselves to take the message and the example of faith to those whose faith has grown weaker or who have drifted away from the Church for whatever reason.

I thought that today, in the context of this gathering, it might be of some interest and to our purpose to mention the new Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation and my understanding of its work and the brief that it has received. I think this relates directly to the question before us of how the Gospel of Christ is presented effectively for the people of our own time and in the different cultures that surround us and drawing upon the experience and expertise of the team from the Bishops' Conference who are here to help and inspire us today.

I welcome Bishop Edwin Regan, Bishop of Wrexham, waiting patiently for his successor to be appointed, Clare Ward from the Bishops' Conference Department of Evangelisation and Catechesis and the members of her team who are most welcome to Birmingham.

**TWO INITIATIVES** alongside the Year of Faith have highlighted the importance and indicate something of the character of the New Evangelisation:

- Pope Benedict's decision to convoke the Synod of Bishops in October 2012 to discuss the topic: "The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith".

The Lineamenta outline the challenge: "The new evangelisation is primarily addressed to those who have drifted from the Church in traditionally Christian countries this phenomenon exists in varying degrees even in some countries where the Good News was proclaimed in recent centuries, but today has not been sufficiently accepted to result in the Christian transformation of persons, families and societies." (Preface)

- Pope Benedict's Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper* establishes the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation. It also highlights the challenge.

It envisages a real engagement with those advancing science and technology, politicians "expanding possibilities with regard to life and individual freedom."

It quotes an important passage from *Christifideles Laici* (n.34) which speaks of both "an indifference to religion and the practice of religion devoid of true meaning in the face of life's very serious problems."

**UBICUMQUE ET SEMPER** speaks of a "variety of situations" that "demands careful discernment." It emphasises that "to speak of a 'new evangelisation' does not in fact mean that a single formula should be developed that would hold the same for all circumstances."

The Apostolic Letter then goes on to entrust certain specific tasks to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation in Article 3 (pp. 9/10).

## **PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE NEW EVANGELISATION**

The first Plenary Meeting of Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation (PCPNE) took place from 30 May to 1 June 2011.

Some significant points arose in the discussion:

The New Evangelisation is not only for Europe but is especially for places where secularisation has changed people's experience and practice of faith.

The importance of establishing a focus within each Bishops' Conference on the New Evangelisation was emphasised. Ad hoc commissions are encouraged rather than setting up cumbersome and demanding long-term structures.

There is a need to assess and appreciate some of the different movements already engaged with the New Evangelisation (e.g. the Neo-catechumenal Way, the work of the Schoenstatt Fathers and the Focolare movement). Pope Benedict met with some of the New Evangelisers in October 2011.

We should be cautious not to adopt a wholly negative attitude towards secularism and we should distinguish it from secularisation. Secularism can certainly have some negative impacts but the phenomenon can also offer a new freedom for the Gospel to be proclaimed.

The New Evangelisation is already happening. Priests, religious and lay faithful will be engaged with the New Evangelisation and they will need special formation as new evangelisers.

There is a need to create a precise pathway in our different contexts for the New Evangelisation. In certain settings this may also demand appropriate ecumenical cooperation.

Insights are needed from Asia and Africa to complement those of the current episcopal membership of the PCPNE.

There should be a continuing dialogue with other relevant Vatican departments - especially in preparation for the 20th anniversary of the Catechism this year.

Regarding the *Lineamenta* document preparing for the Synod of Bishops it was emphasised that each Bishops' Conference should highlight the particular points relevant to its own experience. An important part of the preparation for our own Bishops' Conference representatives to the Synod will be the feed-back from these Crossing the Threshold days being organised in several locations across England and Wales.

**Most Rev Bernard Longley**

*Archbishop of Birmingham*