

Diocese of Hallam

Pastoral Letter

**To be read at all Masses on the weekend of
The Feast of the Holy Family
28/29 December 2013**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

At this time of the year, and particularly on this Sunday, we think especially of family relationships and instinctively recognise that, however difficult they may sometimes be, at their best these relationships enable us to grow as people. They are really Holy Spirit territory, at the heart of whom each one of us is.

But we are human, and our relationships are not always what they might be. Jesus had a very profound understanding of this and at the core of his proclamation of the Good News was the statement that God's love is essentially forgiving love. Most of the time, our forgiveness, and the way we mediate God's forgiveness to each other, is part of the taken for granted of everyday life. But it is there and we need to recognise it and from time to time we need to celebrate it. And that is not simply in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, crucially important as that Sacrament is. In addition to the Sacrament, we need to reflect gratefully on just how forgiving is my wife, my husband, my mother, my father, my child, whoever.

Unfortunately, it is not always as simple as that. As our safeguarding sensitivities in the Catholic Church have developed they have included not only children and vulnerable adults but also domestic relationships. And we have come to know that among the saddest statistics in our country, completely unacceptable statistics are those that show that the incidences of domestic abuse, physical, emotional, and sexual even, is really significant. As well as in the rest of society, sadly it exists within families within our Church also.

So often, abuse is a hidden factor in life. Only the aggressors and the victims know about it. And the victims are often too afraid or too ashamed to reveal what is going

on in their lives. One of the key messages from our stance on this as Church is that it simply must stop.

In some cases, it can amount to a criminal offence, but even when it doesn't go that far, it stunts the growth of the humanity of the abuser and causes untold damage to the victim. Where this is between two people who are committed to loving each other, it hurts not only the couple but all of us.

It is never easy to speak outside the family of something that the family is ashamed of. But sometimes it can be the only way in which to bring to an end a cycle of abuse and the suffering that it causes. Ultimately, it is for the good of all the parties concerned that it should be reported.

In the Diocese, we offer appropriate support to all those affected by domestic abuse. But we can only do that if you speak out on behalf of somebody you know who is affected by it. Our support will recognise the sensitive and hurtful nature of this abuse and will work with you however you are affected, directly or indirectly, to seek resolution, justice and care for everybody.

The key points of contact are: The Diocesan Family Focus Project, the Hurt by Abuse Facilitator, or the Diocesan Safeguarding Office. Please don't hesitate for a moment to make contact with them if they can be of help to you.

May God bless us all abundantly during this coming year.

Yours devotedly

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a small cross-like mark above the 'o'.