

# *Bishop's Farewell Pastoral Letter*

*My Dear People,*

*I wish that we could all have been together last Friday at our Diocesan Farewell Mass celebrated in the Cathedral. However, as I hope you will understand, sheer considerations of space simply did not make that possible. But I would like to take this opportunity of sharing with you now my words on that special occasion.*

*The season of Advent is about beginnings and endings. It marks the end of one liturgical year and the beginning of a new one. It is also true of course, that beginnings and endings are the daily experience of our own lives. I am particularly fond of these words by the poet Keats: 'There is a budding morrow in midnight'. As Christians, at the beginning of each new day we have the privilege of hearing the Lord say to each one of us, 'Follow me' and for us to respond afresh to his call.*

*On a personal level – as I am sure you can appreciate - this is very much a time when I am reflecting on beginning and ending. I was privileged to begin my episcopal ministry 32 years ago when I was ordained bishop in our Cathedral. Going back even further, the beginning of my priestly ministry in 1959 coincided with the calling of the Second Vatican Council.*

*The Council has been deeply formative for me both in my training and my ministry. As a sign of this, I have been proud to wear the special Bishop's Ring which was struck to mark the Council. Pope John likened the Council to opening a window on the world, a world with many hopes and needs to which the Gospel of Jesus Christ could bring its unique light. This involved engaging with issues of justice and peace, of evangelisation, and of seeking unity with the other Christian Churches. On this latter point, nothing has given me greater joy than to have been in a position to translate something of this aim into the local Church. At my ordination as bishop the chairperson then of our church leaders welcomed me as a brother and friend and prayed that we might all work together to build up the Kingdom of God. I am especially delighted to welcome the current leaders of Churches Together in Essex and East London on this occasion, and I do so in that same spirit and with that same continuing prayer. And of course since those days, we have also grown in understanding of the importance of co-operating with all the major faiths in bringing God's presence and peace to our world.*

*As part of this outreach, Pope John and the Council also envisaged an internal renewal of the Church through a reformed liturgy and a more vigorous spiritual life for all the faithful. They did this in two ways.*

*First, by revealing once more that the main role of the bishop is to proclaim the Gospel. And so I would offer my heartfelt thanks to all who have enabled me to seek to carry out this challenging but rewarding task. If I thank first the clergy, it is not only because the Church teaches that they are the main co-workers of the Bishop, but because, as I have been proud to say so many times as Bishop, you are a presbyterate second to none in the whole country. Equally I would say to all the women and men religious of our Diocese that you too are second to none and I thank you with a full heart for your devoted witness to the spirit of the Gospel. But when the Council spoke of spreading the Gospel, it did more.*

*The second focus of the Council was to proclaim the importance of baptism. A baptised person shares in the priesthood and ministry of Christ and is part of the mission of the Church. Hence collaborative ministry at every level is at the essence of the Church's work. On behalf of the Diocese, I cannot thank strongly enough all those outstanding, generous and committed lay faithful engaged in ministry of one form or another in all our parishes and it is my special privilege to thank all at Cathedral House and in the Diocesan Commissions who have exercised this ministry so devotedly. I gladly acknowledge too how our large network of Schools play an important part in the task of mission. Also we are blessed to have a most outstanding Diocesan Youth Service.*

*As you will gather, I have loved being your Bishop. Ours is a Diocese in both East London and Essex of great variety, growth and vibrancy. I am moved to say this evening that I am deeply aware of and very grateful for all the prayers, support and encouragement I have received during my time as Bishop; they have been an immense support throughout my ministry and they will ever be a happy and abiding memory.*

*And so let us return to the season we are celebrating. Advent is about preparing the way for and the revealing of Christ. As I come to the end of my time as Diocesan Bishop people often ask me how I would like to be remembered. I quote the words of Archbishop Michael Ramsey when he was asked a similar question. He replied: 'I would like to be remembered as one who sought to make the reality of Christ known'. That must surely be the task of each one of us - the beginning and end of our Christian calling in the Lord.*

*Thomas  
Bishop of Brentwood*