

A message from our bishop at Advent

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord

'Come, Lord Jesus!' (Revelation 22:20). Advent always reminds us of entering into a new liturgical year in the history of salvation. We are preparing for the Saviour to come

Looking back over the Jubilee Year of Mercy that ended on November 20, the effort made by the Diocesan Ad Hoc Committee for the Jubilee of Mercy, the Liturgy Commission, Church media and all parishes in our diocese are highly appreciated.

Thanks are due to everyone for all the promotion and implementation of formation activities, liturgical celebrations and pastoral matters relating to the Holy Year.

The Opening of the Holy Doors, the arrangement of receiving Jubilee indulgences and the sacrament of reconciliation, as well as pilgrimages to the seven designated churches and chapels have met with the active participation of the faithful from the diocese and other places.

Such spiritual and pastoral acts have deepened our understanding of Jesus as the visible face of the invisible Merciful Father and have reminded us to pray, show mercy and offer forgiveness to one another.

It was amazing that Pope Francis canonised Mother Teresa of Kolkatta during the Jubilee of Mercy on September 4 at St. Peter's Square. Mother Teresa had visited Hong Kong many times.

Her merciful deeds had inspired numerous people here and worldwide to share their comfort, love and respect for life. She was praised for giving material and spiritual support to the poor and the sick.

In his homily at the canonisation Mass, Pope Francis commended her for her defence of human life and being a mother to the poor, as well as a generous dispenser of divine mercy.

"She was committed to defending life, ceaselessly proclaiming that 'the unborn are the weakest, the smallest, the most vulnerable.' She bowed down before those who were spent and left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity," the pope said.

Pope Francis went on to say, "For Mother Teresa, mercy was the 'salt' which gave flavour to her work, it was the 'light' which shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears for their poverty and suffering."

This is also a good reminder for us to be alert to the coming of Jesus.

The life of the unborn is obviously connected with marriage and family. During his pontificate of just over three years, Pope Francis has convened two Synods of Bishops, in 2014 and 2015, on the theme of *family*.

The Holy Father gathered ideas and recommendations expressed by the participating cardinals and synod fathers, and published his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of Love*, on 19 March 2016.

The apostolic document "represents an invitation to Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience" (*The Joy of Love*, 5).

In Hong Kong, with the contribution of ideas from the Board of Diocesan Consultors and the Council of Priests, I have decided to use this *Pastoral Letter for Advent* to announce as a priority for the pastoral work of our diocese in the coming year: *Care for marriage, family and life; Study and live out 'The Joy of Love'*.

In 2014, after attending the Extraordinary Consistory on the Family in February, I conveyed its ideas through my *Easter Pastoral Letter*. A thought emerged from the synod with reference to Genesis 1:27-28 that tells about God's creation of man and woman, uniting them to form a family and procreate.

It is God's plan to create the world with marriage and family. It was also noted that Jesus raised marriage to a sacrament, giving special grace to marital life and declaring that families live out the mystery of Christ and grow in love (see Ephesians 5:32).

Finally, the synod fathers pointed out that the Church emphasises "the inviolable fidelity of spouses" and "an unbreakable union between them" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1646).

However, divorcees should be treated with Christ-like compassion, empathy and mercy, and be accompanied on their spiritual journey. The Church should not just consider the legal aspect of the matter and neglect the scars and pain, nor should wrongs be tolerated or truth be abandoned.

We should lead them to gradually discern and understand the plan of God for them and how to respond to his call, moving into the realm of full communion with the Church.

At the Extraordinary Consistory, I also shared with other bishops about the situation of marriage and family in our diocese. In the last 20 years, the faithful of our diocese have felt the importance of family life deeply.

Many groups of the laity that are concerned with family life and marriage have been formed and provide pastoral care, social services and formative activities for parents, couples and individuals in need.

At the recommendation of the Diocesan Synod in Hong Kong (2000 to 2001), a Diocesan Pastoral Commission for Marriage and the Family was formed to address related pastoral needs.

At a parochial level, many parishes also established a Parochial Pastoral Group for Family, actively propagating formative activities on the positive values of marriage, family and life. I deeply hope that more, even all, parishes will form such groups to help couples and families to overcome difficulties and to promote love and mutual understanding.

The Diocesan Commission mentioned above will provide the necessary assistance and support to parishes.

In recent years, more and more men and women have participated in and benefitted from our Church-run pre-marital courses. Our diocese has more than 10 associations and organisations specialising in ministries on marriage and family life.

Through their service and contribution, a number of experienced Catholic couples are trained to serve in both before and after the wedding day counselling, and to accompany those in need.

However, for Catholics who have sought civil divorces or those that have remarried, our pastoral care is far from sufficient. The Diocesan Pastoral Commission for Marriage and the Family attempts to offer and coordinate the necessary support.

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord: As marriage and family are the foundation stones of society, faith can help families face their challenges in life and a deepened faith can strengthen the bonds within the family.

Let us begin by offering more time and love for families, praying fervently in families, living in harmony and parenting, as well as living out forgiveness and mercy. Then, we can extend this way of life from family to workplace and society.

Finally, I hope the disparity of wealth in our society will be alleviated and the economic improvement of the poor may help resolve certain social conflicts.

Also, job schedules involving long working hours are in need of improvement. Then, more people can enjoy a better family life and nourish their bodies, minds and souls.

Let us prepare ourselves to welcome our Saviour!

May God bless you!

+ John Cardinal Tong

20 November 2016

The Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe

將臨期牧函

主內親愛的弟兄姊妹：

「主耶穌，你來吧！」（默示錄 22:20）隨著將臨期的到來，我們又進入救恩史中另一個新的禮儀年，我們當做好準備迎接基督的到來。

回顧剛過去的「慈悲禧年」，感謝禧年專責小組、禮儀委員會、教區傳播媒體及各堂區的推動，很多有關禧年的培育、禮儀和牧民活動，比如：開啟聖門禮儀、領受全大赦善工、接受修和聖事、前往教區指定的七間聖堂朝聖等等，都獲得信眾積極參與，更體會主基督乃天父慈悲的面容，深化祈禱，踐行憐憫和寬恕。

在禧年中令人感到特別興奮的，就是教宗方濟各今年九月四日在聖伯多祿廣場冊封德蘭修女為聖人，激發大家步武她的芳表，愛護和尊重生命，以及對貧苦弱小者給予物質和精神方面的支援。教宗為這位曾經多次訪港的德蘭修女封聖時，稱許她款待弱小和維護人的生命，更是窮人的母親和慷慨分施天主慈悲的人。

教宗在當天的彌撒講道中指出：「德蘭修女努力維護人的生命，不斷表明『胎兒的生命最為脆弱、微小和貧乏』。德蘭修女俯身照顧那些虛弱、被遺棄在街頭垂死的人，認出天主賦予他們的尊嚴。」教宗續說：「對德蘭修女而言，慈悲有如鹽，給她的每項善工添加味道；慈悲有如光，照亮那些處於黑暗中的人，甚至無力再為自己的貧窮和痛苦而哭泣的人。」這也是將臨期預備基督來臨時儆醒自己的地方。

談到胎兒的生命，便不能不觸及婚姻與家庭。事實上，上任只有三年多的教宗方濟各已於二零一四及一五年召開兩次以家庭為主題的世界主教會議，並綜合與會樞機們的建議，於今年三月十九日發表了《愛的喜樂》宗座勸諭，藉此「邀請基督信徒家庭珍視天主恩賜的婚姻和家庭，持守堅定不移的愛德，並充滿慷慨、委身、忠誠、忍耐等美德。」（《愛的喜樂》，5）。因此，我最近在聽取教區諮議會及司鐸議會的意見後，決定藉此牧函宣布，教區未來一年的牧民重點是：**關顧婚姻、家庭與生命，研習和活出《愛的喜樂》。**

二零一四年，我在參加完二月以家庭為主題的樞機特殊會議後，便透過當年復活節牧函，分享了當中的主題演講，指出《創世紀》第一章 27-28 節，天主創造了男女，使之結合，建立家庭，衍生後代，故婚姻及家庭原是天主創世計劃的藍圖；進而指出主耶穌降生，把婚姻提升為聖事，賦予婚姻生活者特殊恩寵，使家庭能參與基督奧跡，不斷成長（參《厄弗所書》5:32）；最後提到教會常堅持婚姻中夫妻雙方的忠貞不渝及終身結合的永久性（參《天主教教理》

第 1646 條），但對於離婚者，亦應施予耶穌般的同情、體諒和憐憫，與他們同行；既不祇顧法律條文而漠視傷痕、痛苦，也不寬縱錯謬而放棄真理，務求引領他們逐步地分辨和認識天主在他們身上的計劃而加以回應，邁向與教會完全共融的境界。

我也在該樞機特殊會議上分享了香港教區婚姻與家庭的牧民近況：最近二十多年來，本教區教友深感家庭生活的重要，一些相關的教友組織逐步形成，提供各式各樣的牧民關顧、社會服務及培育項目。隨著二零零零至二零零一年教區會議的舉行，我們成立了「教區婚姻與家庭牧民委員會」（婚委會），負責推動教區層面婚姻家庭與生命的牧民工作；而在堂區層面，也有不少堂區成立了「堂區家庭牧民小組」（堂家組），積極地在堂區推廣婚姻與家庭培育及活動。我深盼不久將來有更多堂區，甚至所有堂區都成立堂家組或相關團體，俾能幫助堂區的教友家庭破難解艱，相親相愛，而婚委會也樂於提供協助及支援。

近年，愈來愈多準婚男女參加婚前培育課程，獲益良多。教區內也有十多個婚姻家庭及生命事工團體，積極地投入服務及作出貢獻，且孕育了一批具豐富經驗的教友夫婦，分別在婚前及婚後延續培育過程當中，伴參與者同行，而這些培育活動，確實吸引不少人參加。但是，對於那些離婚的教友、或離婚後再婚的教友的牧民關顧，則尚未足夠，仍需多加努力。因此，婚委會將會負起這項推動及執行工作，並在需要時，邀請其他有關組織協助，以收群策群力之效。

主內親愛的弟兄姊妹：婚姻與家庭是社會的根基，而信仰能幫助家庭面對一生的挑戰，深化信仰更可強化婚姻與家庭的聯繫。讓我們攜手以婚姻及家庭作為實踐愛德的起點，在家庭中多付出時間和愛心，努力推動家庭熱心祈禱，和睦相處，悉心教養子女，並將寬恕和仁愛的實踐，從日常的家居生活，延展到工作環境及社會中。

最後，我期望香港社會能紓緩貧富懸殊的現象，俾有助化解目前社會所面對的矛盾和衝突；並致力減輕市民超時工作的負荷，促使所有家庭成員共享天倫，在身、心、靈方面得以成長，堪當恭迎救主的來臨！

天主保佑！

十湯漢樞機

二零一六年十一月二十日

基督普世君王節