

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1P 1QJ



Pastoral Letter for the Feast of the Holy Family
26 December 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

The stage today is somewhat crowded. Not only is it Boxing Day and the Feast of St Stephen, but it is also the Feast of the Holy Family. The Holy Family takes precedence, and rightly so. But the other two will get a mention.

The Holy Family is the first flowering of the Feast of Christmas. Our concentration on the birth of Jesus embraces Joseph and Mary too. There, in the simple circumstances of an animal's stall, the Holy Family takes shape.

This is no romantic image of family life, far from a respectable home where everything is 'just so'. We easily forget that, at the birth of Jesus, the animals were not at all cuddly and probably very smelly; and that the manger was filled not with soft hay, but scratchy straw. Yet these were the circumstances into which the Eternal Word, through whom all things are made, chose to enter our world. So let's put aside any idea that there is no connection between this Holy Family and the reality of our own home life.

Not so! We can hold this Holy Family to be a model, an inspiration, for our family life precisely because it is thoroughly human, thoroughly immersed in the same realities as ours, and thoroughly dependent on the goodness of its members, strengthened by the all-present grace of God.

In this past year, we have been giving additional thought and attention to Joseph. He emerges as a parent full of tender love. By this I mean that the love he had for the child in his care was both strong and gentle. Every parent needs this. This love does not overlook weakness and failings in a child. But it does mean never humiliating, or belittling a youngster because of his or her struggles. Such tenderness is an expression of strength. Such tenderness comes from a love that has eyes only for what is best for the young person making their way to maturity. The quiet, steadfast love of Joseph is part of what makes his family holy and is a model for holiness in our own homes too.

This parental love shown by Joseph was never possessive. Parental love is not only full of wonder at the uniqueness of the new life in their child, but also knows that the child is given as a gift to be cared for, and not a possession to be managed. In this sense, human parenthood is about letting go.

This helps us to understand the words of Jesus when he says: 'You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven' (Mt 23:9). Our Heavenly Father entrusted us to our parents. In turn he entrusts your children to you, yet always remaining Father of us all, and forever.

Now, Boxing Day. In my family life Boxing Day was always a special day. Its title that comes from opening boxes containing presents. Family presents were exchanged on Christmas Day. But on Boxing Day the circle widened. Aunts and Uncles, friends and lonely neighbours came round on this day. And so the joy of giving and receiving was extended. We sing about Good King Wenceslaus doing just this on the Feast of Stephen!

Yes, Boxing Day is also and always the Feast of St Stephen, the first martyr. His gift, in response to the presence of Jesus amongst us in our flesh, was to give up his life in witnessing to Jesus. In the account of his martyrdom we read that, as he gave his testimony, he cried out: 'I can see heaven thrown open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56). For this truth, heard by his audience as gross blasphemy, he was stoned to death.

Stephen's martyrdom is also a flowering of the Feast of Christmas, for in the eyes of faith there is a close link between our birth into this world and our entry, or second birth, into the next. Christmas marks the entry of Jesus into our flesh, and Easter brings the new life of the Resurrection. As we celebrate the Nativity, St Stephen teaches us to look forward to our 'second birth', because when this life ends we have the sure hope of eternal life. For us, too, the heavens will be thrown open and we shall indeed see the Son of Man and the all-consuming glory of God, the greatest gift of all. As we celebrate the birth of Christ and the entry into heaven of St Stephen, we see again the contours of our lives and the destiny that lies before us.

The Holy Family marks out our route. Boxing Day teaches us the greater joy of giving than of receiving. St Stephen proclaims the new and heavenly birth that our Saviour comes to give us.

A happy and joyful Christmas to you all and a happy New Year.

Yours devotedly,

+ Vincent Nichols

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster

Parish Note Friday 24 December 2021 Christmas Eve and the Sunday Message on the Feast Day of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Bishop's Stortford - St Joseph & The English Martyr <bishopsstortford@rcdow.org.uk>

Fri 12/24/2021 12:57 PM

To: Bishop's Stortford - St Joseph & The English Martyr <bishopsstortford@rcdow.org.uk>

Good afternoon

Please find attached a Pastoral letter from Cardinal Vincent on the Feast Day of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph which can also be found on our website.

Well, it's been another very busy week in the parish, a real hive of activity, with very long days and lots of work being done by all behind the scenes to hopefully make everything run smoothly over this weekend. Sophie and the 'Mums' have done a sterling job assembling the crib at St Joseph's, the talented 'Flower ladies' have been busy at all three of our Churches creating spectacular arrangements and the 'Dad's group' finished the last session of the Advent course. We have also had the 'Strippers' in the Church, as they are affectionately known(!), 'Barry and Keith' who are finishing off stripping layers of old paint from the stone arches in an assured and very dignified 'Non full Monty kind of way'. The Sound man has been in too balancing the new microphones to enhance the overall audio experience and even the Wi-Fi Guys, so that we can properly use the contactless giving machines. Fr Antonio and I prepared for the huge influx of online and telephone bookings, which momentarily crashed the website, which, then thankfully bounced back! The Live stream camera dropped affecting the visual display, so Fr Peter climbed the ladder under the choir loft, to fix this, whilst I clung on to his ankles, all in the name of health and safety! An Ecumenical Carol service was enjoyed by many at Holy Cross as well as the Children's 'Journey to Bethlehem'. Thank you to Joan, who will be opening Most Holy Redeemer for private prayer this evening between 8pm - 9pm. Thank you also to our Sacristans, especially Monica who comes in daily, rain or shine and to Len at MHR, our hard-working cleaning teams, who have daily prepared and fogged the churches ready for you and to the Stewards who have given up their time to ensure everyone is safely shown to their booked seat. Thank you to our Altar Servers prepared by Christopher and Robert, our fabulous Musicians, Choirs, Readers, Eucharistic Ministers, Collectors, Counters, Catechists, Welcomers, and to our lovely ladies who run the Repositories. Thank you to those who sit on the various committees and parish councils, those who balance the books and look after the Parish Centre and Church buildings. Thank you to those who come to worship at our three churches, and to our faithful on line parishioners from far and wide, who will often send in an email or call to pass on a kind comment. This has been much appreciated during what has been another challenging year for everyone. The Christmas tree is now up, the lights are on and today we release an updated version of our 'Virtual Christmas Carol service', complete with lyrics to print, which can be found on our web site

<https://rcstortford.org.uk/2021/12/24/parish-christmas-carol-service-2021/>

and also our You tube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8cqZ3tsZymsV_YM8oSYXLA .. so, sit back, relax and enjoy!

CHRISTMAS MASS BOOKINGS - The Booking system closes at 3pm today. If you know that you are unable to come to Mass, please let the office know ASAP so that we are able to release your seat for another parishioner. Stewards will be at the church to welcome those who have booked. Face masks are to be worn in the church and hands sanitised upon arrival please. Entry will be via the main doors only. All doors will be kept open during Mass to ventilate the church. At full capacity there will be 171 people in the Church so **please consider also taking a lateral flow test before you come. Thank you.**

PLEASE KEEP IN YOUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS - all those who have lost a loved one this year and will be facing a very different Christmas and to those who are sick, lonely or having to self-isolate. We especially remember all those in our parish who have died and give thanks for the positive difference that they continue to make in our own lives.

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen.

HONOURING SUNDAY -During the pandemic, public worship was suspended for a time and there have been restrictions on parish life. As a result, people have been exploring other ways to practice their faith including

Spiritual Communion via live streaming. As people begin returning to more regular patterns of parish life, the bishops of England and Wales have issued the following statement about the importance of honouring Sunday. <https://rcstortford.org.uk/2021/11/19/bishops-statement-honouring-sunday/>

An extract from the Bishop's Conference. *'The Sunday Eucharist is a gift; as God's holy people we are called to praise and thank God in the most sublime way possible. When the Church speaks of the Sunday obligation, it reminds us that attending Mass is a personal response to the selfless offering of Christ's love.'*

At this time, we recognise that for some people there may be certain factors which hinder attendance at Sunday Mass. The pandemic is clearly not over. The risk of infection is still present. For some, there is legitimate fear in gathering together. As your bishops, we recognise that these prevailing circumstances suggest that not everyone is yet in the position to fulfil the absolute duty to attend freely Sunday Mass.

CONFIRMATION CANDIDATES - Please keep Sunday 9th Jan in your diary for the next session - whether it be in person or online, it will go ahead! And a reminder that the accompanying webpages will be updated by Wednesday next week, for you to check out in advance of the session.

ADMISSION TO ST JOSEPH'S ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL RECEPTION - The application process for admission to **Reception Class** at St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School for children born between 1st September 2017 and 31st August 2018 will open on 1st November 2021 and close on 15th January 2022.

School application forms will be available on St. Joseph's School website from 1st November. They must be completed with the necessary documentation and returned to the school by 15th January 2022.

In addition to the school forms, you **MUST** complete the online Hertfordshire County Council application form (or your local authority if not Hertfordshire) - see www.hertsdirect.org
For more information, please see the school website: www.stjosephs207.herts.sch.uk

CERTIFICATE OF CATHOLIC PRACTICE - Applicants for St Joseph's School for **RECEPTION** places in 2022 should collect a white 'embossed' application form for a certificate from No 3 Windhill, the Sacristy after Mass or the Parish Office in person. Once completed it should then be posted through the letter box of No 3 Windhill marked for Fr Antonio's attention **with a stamped addressed envelope, please**. The Certificate will then be posted to you. The School deadline is 15/1/2022.

HOLY TRINITY WINTER NIGHT SHELTER - <https://www.htwinternightshelter.org/> If you would like to help raise funds towards the Holy Trinity Shelter, please donate online Sort code: 60-02-36 Account Number: 67759521 Thank you very much.

CAPITAL GRANTS -Bishop's Stortford Town Council is considering making available a fund to provide capital grants to local organisations which benefit the residents of the Town. The Council has already invited expressions of interest from sporting bodies, it is now inviting expressions from any organisation serving the town which may benefit from a capital grant. Although no firm decision has been made, it is likely that grants available under this fund will be in the range £10,000-£1,000,000 (Smaller grants are available under our ongoing Community Grants programme).

Further details and the form to use to express an interest are available on the Town Council grants page <https://www.bishopsstortfordtc.gov.uk/grants>
Responses must be received no later than 15th January 2022.

PARISH OFFICE - Debbie will be away from the office from Monday 27 December to Monday 3rd January inclusive and back on Tuesday 4th January 9am-3pm. If you have an urgent enquiry during this time, please leave a message on the answerphone 01279 654063 as this will be checked daily by Fr Peter and Fr Antonio. All other enquiries and non-urgent requests will be dealt with immediately upon her return. Thank you.

PARISHIONERS OF THE WEEK - Thank you to YOU, the Parishioners of the Catholic Parish of Bishop's Stortford' for your continued support over this past year and to our wonderful Priests, Fr Peter and Fr Antonio for their

faith, love, guidance and loyal service.

To finish this week, a Christmas prayer..

"Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

I hope that you all have a very happy, healthy Holy Christmas and New Year!

Best wishes

Debbie

Parish Administrator

(Mon- Fri 9am - 3pm)

Catholic Parish of Bishop's Stortford

St Joseph and the English Martyrs, Bishop's Stortford

Holy Cross, at St Andrew's, Church Lane, Much Hadham

Most Holy Redeemer, Sayesbury Road, Sawbridgeworth

3 Windhill, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 2ND

Telephone: 01279 654063

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Parish Website: <https://www.rcstortford.org.uk>

Follow our Live streaming on www.churchservices.tv/bishopsstortford

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