



Pastoral letter for Lent 2017

« Approaching Easter in hope and trust » (Unofficial translation)

My dear brothers and sisters,

I would like to address this message to you, as I do each year at the beginning of the Lenten season.

This is an important year for our Church. All existing parishes will be dissolved, and, at the opening of the Octave, I will solemnly formalise the creation of 33 new parishes divided among 6 new deaneries. This restructuring of our parishes is the result of a long reflexion process. My predecessor had already clustered the then 274 parishes into 57 parish communities. However, the erosion of our Church has continued; today we no longer have sufficient numbers of ordained ministers or pastoral assistants to serve them all. The recognition of this reality gave rise to a whole series of talks, meetings, assemblies and training sessions over a period of more than 3 years. In the course of these discussions, it became very clear that a fresh start was called for. The figure of 33 was reached after lengthy consultations on the ground. It became equally clear that change induces fear, and can give rise to insecurity and discord. I take such expressions of discontent very seriously, but do not wish us to come to a halt on that account. On the contrary, my thanks go to all who took part in these discussions in their pastoral communities. You contributed many appropriate and constructive proposals for shaping a forward-looking pastoral action.

The fact that the new parishes will be fewer in number does not at all mean that the Church is withdrawing into itself, or turning away from people. The

very opposite is true: the new parishes provide an opportunity to rise to the challenges of our times with renewed missionary zeal and fresh ideas.

The time when Luxembourg society was by and large imbued with Christianity is over. The central core of the Church, that is to say the number of Catholics actively taking part in Sunday Mass, has dropped drastically in many parts of the country. The separation of Church and State has moreover sown much disquiet and even fear among the faithful.

But our faith in the triune God is greater than our fears. We believe that the hands of the Lord hold and sustain us. We believe that the risen Christ lives within our Church. We believe that the Holy Spirit will guide our Church.

This is therefore no time for lamentation or complaint, no time for looking backwards or for enslavement to our past! No, now is the time for letting ourselves be led by the Lord towards His vision of the future!

And so, I ask you to live this Lent intensely. Fast and pray for the renewal of our Church in Luxembourg! Let us make good use of this time for a sincere conversion and self-renewal. Let us take the time to follow the Way of the Cross, to set aside time for Adoration in our parishes.

Would this not also be a good moment to return to saying grace at mealtimes? Let us once again profess our faith publicly! Let us take part in the Holy Week liturgies, and especially the Easter Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil.

The more individual Christians develop a personal attachment to God, the more the Church as a whole is able to give witness to the faith. The sanctification of the individual Christian contributes to the sanctification of the whole Church. Take courage, go to a priest for confession, make a fresh start! Lent gives us a chance to shake off tendencies towards defeatism or internal bickering, and of anchoring ourselves instead in the love of God.

We are on the threshold of a new stage in the history of our Church. We can no longer rely for our financing solely on the State and local authorities. We shall have to be self-financing to a far greater extent than in the past. That is why the Fondation Sainte Irmine was set up. We need your financial support

to be able to implement pastoral projects both at diocesan level, and in the new parishes.

One of the most important of these projects is parish-based catechesis. I would like to thank all the teams who over recent months have undergone training so as to be able to offer catechesis in the new parishes as of next autumn.

However, money is not our only need. A priest will not be able to keep a parish church alive single-handed. We need large numbers of volunteers willing to commit to serving the Church in one capacity or another. Any freely given service, no matter how small, is welcome. For many years to come, we will need to rally all our strength if we are to rise to the challenge posed by the new parishes and by the catechesis project.

Through the intercession of Our Lady, Consoler of the Afflicted, may God grant us the strength to accept this challenge joyfully. Let us then set forth, in a spirit of hope and trust, on the path leading us up to the celebration of the Resurrection.

Luxembourg, 20th February, 2017

+Jean-Claude Hollerich
Archbishop of Luxembourg