



Greetings in the name of Jesus, the Word made flesh who by the action of God and the obedience of His blessed Mother, the God bearer, came to dwell among us, Emmanuel.

In November, I visited Pakistan to express solidarity with Christian communities across the country, which have suffered much over recent years. We remember the slaughter of innocent worshippers on Easter Sunday 2016 in Lahore, and before that the attack on worshippers in Peshawar at Christmas 2013 and many other incidents. Such attacks are not only designed to inflict appalling suffering but also to sow fear in the heart of Christian, and other minority communities. During the visit I spoke with some of the survivors of these attacks, and I was deeply moved and humbled by their extraordinary courage in continuing to be faithful witnesses of Jesus. They spoke of knowing now more than ever that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

In many parts of our troubled, uncertain world, Christian minority communities along with other minorities are being similarly targeted. In some places, this is motivated by a desire to eradicate the indigenous Christian presence completely. These are acts not only of terror but of genocide; criminal acts for which the international community must bring those guilty to account. Yet although so vulnerable and often forgotten and marginalised, our brothers and sisters are being courageous in the Lord. Indeed, 'God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong' (1 Corinthians 1.27).

In other places conflict and corruption have become so normal that the world forgets the suffering of the poor.

I ask your prayers for those of us who live in safety that we may not be bystanders afar off, beating our breasts as we retire to the security of our homes, but that we may draw nearer to the cross of Jesus, stand there alongside our suffering brothers and sisters and be ready to take our part in practical action for change. I pray that Christ will strengthen all his people in our inner being with power through the Holy Spirit to be faithful, to have courage and to live in hope.

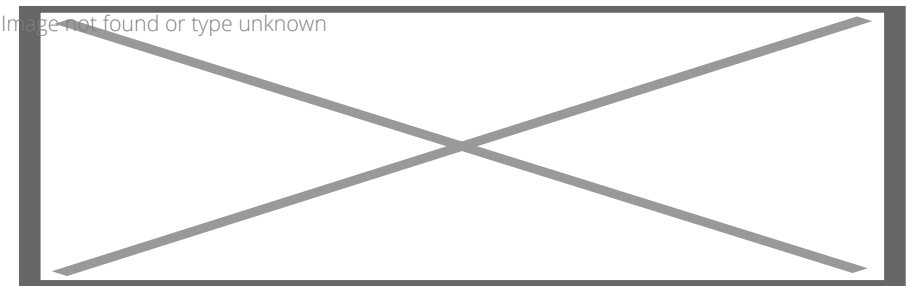
More than ever we need Christ like communities proclaiming the good news of the gospel in word and action. In many countries there is no persecution but there is apathy and complacency which leads us, in the striking words of Pope Francis, to be practical atheists.

The measure of a Christ-like community is the extent to which it holds the vulnerable and marginalised of the world at the centre of its life. Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, helped the Primates of the Anglican Communion to see this at our meeting in January this year. He has said elsewhere: 'To live with Jesus is to live with the poor, to live with the poor is to live with Jesus' (*Community and Growth* 1989).

More than ever, we have a strong sense of the unity of Christians. God hears the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ that we 'may be one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17. 21) and even now is fulfilling his prayer. While we are deeply conscious today of the ecumenism of blood, we also live in the ecumenism of hope and we are called to an ecumenism of action. To live with the vulnerable and

marginalised, with Jesus Christ at the centre of our communities and at the heart of our ecumenical relations, to act together out of love and in love, love that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, is also to live as those who sow hope. Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life' (John 8.12). John the Evangelist, in words that will be heard in many of our churches during the forthcoming Christmas season, also strengthens us with this message: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1.5).

In our common celebration of the light of Jesus coming into the world, may we then encourage and build up one other, and so may the Church in every place, united in suffering and in hope, shine with his light and act with his strength, today.



The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby

Archbishop of Canterbury

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