Dear all,

I print below an email I have sent today to those individuals from the Dioceses of Exeter and Truro who have expressed their interest in The Society. I append it to this email addressed to you because, from the records available, you are resident in our adjoining Dioceses to the East. The email is sent to appraise you of the current situation and to assure you that you are welcome to any of our events and to participate with us in any way you wish. Within the not too distant future, the Bishops of The Society will develop a regional plan which will allocate one of our number to each of the Dioceses in the country. Until such time as this is concretised please feel to be part of the South West region which is easily identifiable because of my Episcopal role in both the Diocese of Exeter and Truro.

Dear all,

I have obtained your email addresses from the SSWSH website and want to thank you for registering your interest in The Society. This comes with the assurance of my prayers for you and with my very best wishes for a happy, holy and blessed Christmas season. My prayer for us all is that we never fail to be surprised by the ways in which God comes into our lives with his forgiving love and transforming grace. As we celebrate his Incarnation so let us commit ourselves to continuing in faithful discipleship as we seek to reveal the truth of that love in our lives day by day. The shepherds lived in the margins and the kings had been wondering at least for a while and yet they were amongst the first to greet the Incarnate Lord …

As some of you will have heard me say at the launch of The Society in the South West in Exeter Cathedral on 26th November, The Society is not yet another pressure group, political action group, devotional society, organisation or club for the like minded. Rather it is intended to be an ecclesial body, led by Bishops and committed to leading the Catholic life in communion with others who are committed to the ecumenical goal of the full visible unity of God's Church. I have invited a number of people across the region to help me give some structure and shape to the life of our Society in this area and this will all be made plain with the passing of time.

The purpose of this email is to assure you that The Society is in existence and if you wish to see some evidence of that please refer to The Society website and follow the links to various regions represented. Our own region features and we will do all that we can to keep our section of the website up to date.

The first meeting of The Society's "Council" which took place the other day decided that in addition to our declared emphasis being about how we can effectively participate in God's mission to the world we would in addition be concentrating on areas to do with spirituality and vocation in its broadest aspect. Not only vocation to ordained ministry and the religious life but also to other specifically Christian serving ministries, like the caring professions and education. As a sign of our commitment to these areas of work we will be producing some devotional material for use by individuals during Lent next year. Given the short time scale it might be that the material is not available until fairly close to Ash Wednesday but it will be available and we will distribute it electronically and it will also be placed on the website. Therefore please plan your Lenten discipline to include the use of this material.

Whilst writing, I would like to give notice of the regional Chrism Mass which will take place on Wednesday 4th April at 12 noon at St Michael's, Heavitree. You might also like to note the date of the Glastonbury Pilgrimage for this year which is the 16th of June with a solemn concelebrated mass at 12 noon at which the principal celebrant will be the Bishop of Beverley. The day will conclude with a procession of witness and benediction and the preachers on the day will be the Bishop of Ebbsfleet and me.

For a number of years there has been a Plymouth Pilgrimage to Walsingham and we are trying to extend this next year to include people from across the region and the dates of this Pilgrimage are 24th to 28th September. Further information about this opportunity can be obtained from Barbara Norris (23 Lakeview Close, Holly Park, Plymouth PL5 4LT tel: 01752 210703).

In conclusion, could I please encourage you to do all that you can to publicise the life of The Society and to persuade individuals to register their interest either by logging on to the website or by completing a form, copies of which can be taken from any current addition of New Directions. In addition to individuals registering their interest it is also possible for parishes and other organisations to request affiliation to The Society. The more individuals who register themselves as being participants in The Society the better and the more PCCs and other organisations that are affiliated to The Society the more we will be able to say to others that we are a significant body of faithful Christian disciples who long to remain and serve God's mission in this land. Please use every effort to encourage individuals to register their interest and other organisations to affiliate. Those organisations wishing to affiliate to The Society should indicate their intention by sending an email to the website.

Finally, once again, I wish you and yours a holy, blessed and peaceful Christmas.

With all good wishes and the assurance of my prayers,

+John

As the email above expresses, I wish you a holy, blessed and peaceful Christmas.

With all good wishes,

+John

The Rt Rev'd John Ford

Bishop of Plymouth

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