



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

*To be read in all Churches on the weekend of 30th September/1st October 2017,
the Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time.*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Wednesday 4th October is the Feast of Saint Francis. Saint Francis, you may recall, heard the Lord say to him “Francis, rebuild my Church.” On his feast day, in the Cathedral, we will be launching a programme for the whole Diocese called “Hope in the Future” which is about growing together as missionary disciples of Jesus, gathered in missionary parishes.

“Hope in the Future” is an opportunity for parishes and faith organisations to celebrate all that we already are and do and then, over a period of time, to identify and develop ways in which we may grow in our missionary purpose. Pope Francis urges us to be aware of the poverty, isolation, marginalisation and needs of people around us and to bring the practical care of the Gospel to them. In order to do that effectively we must always be strengthening our own communities with a worthy celebration of the Sacraments, a life of prayer, an effective and engaging catechesis of the faith for the young and those who may feel drawn to our Church. We must be sure to look after our own community but then be ready to bring our good works to others in need, our brothers and sisters around us. The tragedy of the Manchester bomb has highlighted a need to strengthen the sense of community in our towns and build bridges. We need to respond with positive actions.

“Hope in the Future” is not a ‘one size fits all’ rigid programme. We have a great variety of parishes in urban, suburban and rural contexts, all with different strengths and needs. No two parishes are the same. This project is an invitation to every parish to celebrate all that is already good in its life, to recognise new possibilities and needs and to share best practice with other parish communities. It is an invitation to be positive, bold and imaginative.

Following the launch on 4th October we begin the journey together in Advent. I realise that, with all the changes going on around us, parishes will engage with this process at different speeds. But I do hope every parish will want to take part.

The first of the five stages is a celebration of all that we have and provide in our parishes – rather more, I believe, than we would imagine. Let us give thanks for all that is done in the name of the Gospel and for the generosity of so many people who offer their skills and gifts and time. But let us not be afraid to ask what more we might be doing to improve the world in which we live.

All five stages of "Hope in the Future" will be carefully introduced and resourced. Every parish is asked to form a small team which will ensure that any additional planning does not fall to the parish clergy as I am concerned that we must lighten their load and allow them to be all that God requires them to be in their priestly ministry.

I am hoping that every parish will be represented at the launch on Wednesday, by both priests and parishioners. Its success will depend, in no small manner, on the prayers and the good will of all the people in the Diocese and I ask for your active participation in both prayer and action. If we were all to undertake just one task in our parishes we would transform the witness we give and make a difference to the lives of so many people.

I want to thank you for the ready acceptance of change that is occurring in many parts of the Diocese. Following the completion of the Consultation, work has begun on the amalgamation of parishes and the re-appointing of clergy. I can well understand feelings of disappointment and loss but there seems to be a clear understanding of both need and opportunity. There will be further changes but I am very grateful for the generosity shown by so many as we pray and think and plan together for the Diocese and prepare our Church for future generations.

Our changes cannot simply be limited to a reconfiguring of parishes and decisions about church buildings. Our way of thinking and working must also change. Pope Francis has reminded us that the Second Vatican Council's teaching about the role of the lay faithful has not, in many respects, been implemented and we have to recognise God's gifts in each one of us and harness those gifts for the building of the Church in its mission. While fewer in number, we have sufficient priests if we are careful to ensure that they are left free for priestly ministry. There are so many aspects of ministry and administration in parish life that can be established, developed and enriched by the contribution of members of the community. Your commitment to the mission of the Church today is one of the greatest blessings in our Diocese. Thank you.

We are most certainly in challenging times. But the challenges will not overwhelm us. Do we really trust in the words of Jesus that "I am with you always, until the end of time"? Do we believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit who Jesus said would "remind you of everything that I said to you and will lead you in all truth?" If we can believe in these things then we can certainly step out with "Hope in the Future"

May our daily prayer always include that invitation to Jesus Himself; "Stay with us, Lord, on our journey"

Yours devotedly,
+John
Bishop of Salford