



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

To be read and distributed in all Parishes on the weekend of 14th/15th October 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

What is God asking of us, as the community of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Salford? How should we be living the Gospel values in our present times? These are important questions that we need to address.

It is all too easy to think that the Church provides us with familiar routines and objectives. That sense of reliable consistency can be very appealing, when so many other things are changing. Some may see their religious faith as something which is private to themselves, giving them a direction and a self-discipline. But Pope Francis is insistent in declaring that we are “missionary disciples”. Our Faith is not something that we can celebrate in private. We need to be living our Faith in all our actions and decisions, as nothing less than “ambassadors for Christ”, as St Paul calls us. Nor do we live our Faith on our own – it is best lived and expressed in community, whether in school, family or parish. It is by working together that we can achieve more.

As we live in a fast-changing world, we must be prepared to question our priorities and our aspirations. There are global issues that are so distressing: the war in Ukraine, conflicts in other parts of the world, the plight of refugees and migrants, religious persecution, poverty, and the increasing impact of climate change. While we must look to the Universal Synod to prioritise global actions as the Catholic Church, we must recognise that we have a particular responsibility for our local Church, here in the Northwest of England and its own particular needs and opportunities.

Pope Francis’ announcement of a Universal Synod took many by surprise. We had probably known of Synod meetings in the past, usually comprised of bishops, but the practice of “synodality” and the way a synod is carried out, was unfamiliar to many. As we now engage with our local Diocesan Synod, we are better equipped to play our part in prayer, listening and discernment. Everyone – priests, religious, laity - is invited to participate. From this weekend, we are beginning what is called “The Big Listen”, in our synod process. This will continue until mid-January 2024. This is a time when we are asked to respond to some specific questions and see what thoughts occur. We are not being asked to form firm opinions or to discuss or argue a point of view. This is not a debate, to be won or lost.

Whether you feel moved to submit answers to the synod questions or not, there is an invitation to pray for the Synod, using the Synod Prayer or simply in your own words. A determination to pray for the

Synod will ensure that we are moving in the right direction and hearing the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have a grace-filled opportunity to shape the priorities of our Diocese for the coming years. There will no doubt be challenges ahead but together we can listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and be guided by the Spirit's grace.

It is also important in this process that we engage other Catholics who are not closely associated with their parishes or who might feel distanced from their faith. What would they like the Church to be for them? How might it have failed them in some way? It will be important that young people feel welcome to participate. During this listening time, all the commissioned Synod Members are encouraged to facilitate one or more local listening sessions in their parishes, schools, or organisations. It is my hope that many people will feel able to contribute thoughts and ideas. Contributions can also be made independently on-line, through the website.

One matter that I think will be included in our synodal discernment is the matter of caring for the environment and our common home. In his recent exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis has rehearsed the challenges that we face and the global failure to meet those challenges through the various COP meetings. He is insistent that we all have our part to play in repairing the damage of climate change, but he also speaks strongly of the need of a global response to this global problem. He asks for a new form of "multilateral" action by governments working together. He believes that the growing awareness and actions from people can encourage and demand such a new form of global action.

Therefore, I am asking that all our parishes and schools make a priority of having environmental groups who can promote the good use of facilities and grounds, dispensing information about how we might adjust our lives in what Pope Francis calls an "ecological conversion". By growing in our awareness of climate change, by our learning and helping to educate others, we will be speaking loudly and clearly to our politicians about the priorities that need to be expressed in radical policies and how industrial practices need to change.

We certainly live in challenging times. Jesus said, "I am with you always...." He said that he would send the Holy Spirit to "remind you of all I have said to you and to lead you in all truth". Through our Diocesan Synod, let us be determined to be listening to all that the Spirit is saying to us and responding so that we are truly caring for our brothers and sisters and our common home, as well as determining priorities for the future work of our Diocese.

I happily remind you of the importance and relevance of our Diocesan Prayer "Stay with us, Lord, on our Journey".

May God bless you for all you achieve through your Faith and actions.

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John" with a small cross above the first letter.

Bishop of Salford

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