



# 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 31<sup>st</sup> August/1<sup>st</sup> September*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

I think it appropriate to write to you at this time concerning three different but closely related matters.

This summer has seen considerable unrest in our cities, with the riots that followed the appalling murder of three children and the wounding of others. It has been clearly established that the riots were promoted by racism, anti-Islamic prejudice and what the Prime Minister referred to as “Far right thuggery”. There was much misinformation and “fake news” promoted by the misuse of social media. We must be grateful for the response of our law enforcement personnel and the prompt action of the courts which will surely deter similar disruption in the future, and for the generosity within local communities in repairing the damage that was done. The counter protests also had their positive impact, in displaying the active opposition and rejection of such prejudice. But we need to be constructive in a further response. Our Diocese has a long history of welcome to diverse communities, including people of different nationalities and religious belief who have assisted our economic and social progress. We must not take that diversity for granted but continue to build and strengthen a sense of community. I urge everyone to take any opportunity to befriend your neighbours, work colleagues and the people with whom you can build any association. We can learn and benefit from the different cultures and bring advantage to our lives together. Growing and promoting that understanding and friendship will strengthen our communities and reject any sense of racial or religious prejudice.

In recent years we have celebrated the “Season of Creation”, which runs from 1<sup>st</sup> September to the Feast of St Francis of Assisi on 4<sup>th</sup> October. The Season of Creation is seen as a worldwide celebration of prayer and action to protect our common home, and a time to renew our relationship with God as Creator, and all creation. The Season of Creation presents opportunity to promote our understanding of the complexity of Nature and the environment and to show, as Pope Francis says, how “each and every one of us has our part to play”. More recently in *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis acknowledges that personal, family and community habits are contributing and helping to bring about large processes of transformation. This is something to be celebrated as we see action across our Diocese. But we need to do more. This year’s theme for the Season of Creation is “To Hope and Act” and reflects our need to respond with urgency. Our simple actions in our daily lives can make a significant impact on the environment, and we must all make changes to our daily routines and work to create change across our wider communities. We could do well to learn from the enthusiasm to be found

particularly in our schools where our children are so enthusiastic about learning about nature and creating spaces in their grounds to care for creation. This complements the wider diocesan work with schools to install solar panels to reduce energy consumption across school buildings and in some of our parishes. Our actions matter, as do those by governments and industries, where we need to see greater changes. Let us not forget the role we have in lobbying for change, through contact with local councillors and members of parliament. We need to promote better practice in order to secure a healthy environment for future generations. While we have been spared the severity of so many climate events that we see in other parts of the world, we have certainly experienced disruption of our seasons, with droughts, heatwaves and exceptional rainfall which is already disrupting agriculture and food security. I ask you all during this Season of Creation to reflect on what more you can do to care for creation and to use the resources that we have made available to help you in your journey to take action.

Finally, but closely connected to both our community building and our care for our environment, is our Diocesan Synod. This is necessarily a lengthy process, because discernment requires time and reflection and prayer, but we must not lose the positive momentum that brought us to "The Big Listen". We now have just six months to complete the process, and this will include parish meetings and the gathering of further thoughts and suggestions. It is already clear that we will certainly benefit by this process, and we will understand better how we are to promote and live the Gospel values in our times and choose the right priorities for building Church and Faith in our Diocese. Information about how to participate in the next stage has been circulated to all the parishes and organisations. I am grateful to all who have participated in any way up to this point, but I must ask that we all engage in this final period, both in the attendance of parish meetings and in our prayer. That combination, of prayer and action, will guide us to the important decisions that need to be made.

These are certainly turbulent and challenging times within our country and our world. I think we do well to have frequent recourse to our diocesan prayer, "Stay with us, Lord, on our Journey" as we seek to do what is right and good. We would also do well to turn to Our Lady with particular problems and decisions with our simple request "Mary, untier of knots, pray for us". May the God of love, bless us all and guide us to achieve all that He asks of us.

Yours devotedly,



Bishop of Salford

Tel: 0161 794 2825

[bishop@dioceseof-salford.org.uk](mailto:bishop@dioceseof-salford.org.uk) (bishop) [marie.sartini@dioceseofsalford.org.uk](mailto:marie.sartini@dioceseofsalford.org.uk) (PA)

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