



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

*To be read in all Churches on the weekend of 21st/22nd November, 2015,
the Feast of Christ the King.*

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is important that I write to you again about several matters. I hope that, apart from this letter being read at Mass, there will be an opportunity for you to have copies, or that you may read it again on the diocesan website.

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. Coming as the last Sunday of the liturgical year it is a clear reminder of what we are about and the priorities that we must always have as Catholics. Christ is the summit of our Faith. There is a need to be constantly strengthening our Faith in Him, growing in our knowledge of Him and His ministry, and continuing that ministry through our role as His ambassadors by our prayer, work and example. This is a good moment to take an overview of our progress. I have been your bishop and pastor for almost a year and I have spent that time learning about a Diocese which is new to me. There is much energy and commitment in the priests and people of the Diocese of Salford and I am grateful to every one of you for all that is being achieved.

I must thank you sincerely for the completion of the diocesan-wide consultation which brought several thousand responses. There was good consensus in what was said, with many wise comments and accounts of valuable experience. I have written a report which is available in two forms. The full report is available in parishes and on the Diocesan website and the shorter form – a summary of decisions – should be available to you at the back of the church at the end of the Mass.

As you will see from the summary of the report, the consensus expressed allows me to immediately make a number of decisions about our sacramental life, pastoral life and the administration of the Diocese. Other matters require further consideration and more decisions will follow. I have also been able to ask priests and people to take up various positions of responsibility in the Diocese; some being confirmed in positions they already held and others starting afresh. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who held various posts during this last year and carried out responsibilities with which they had been entrusted by my predecessor, Bishop Terence. That continuity in this my first year has been invaluable to me. At this point, it is sufficient to name only the two Vicars General, Mgr Anthony Kay and Canon Michael Cooke and the five Episcopal Vicars: Fr

Paul Daly (Formation), Canon Paul Brindle (Care of Clergy), Canon Anthony McBride (Education), Fr David Glover (Caritas) and Fr Peter Hopkinson (Dialogue and Ecumenism). I am most grateful for their generosity in accepting these responsibilities. Each of them will lead teams of clergy and lay people who will be responsible for the developing mission of our Diocese for Evangelisation and social outreach.

In the coming year we must also turn our attention to the practical challenge of consolidating the parishes. We have too many small communities, far more than can realistically be served by the priests of the Diocese. Many of our current parishes were formed at a time when the Catholic population (and especially the Mass-going population) was a lot higher than it is today. Over the next eight months, through various levels of consultation and discussion, I will be asking priests and people about the best way of naming what, in the Consultation Report, I refer to as "Mission Parishes". The "Mission Parishes" will each have a resident priest or priests and may well contain more than one church. To allow the parishes to be missionary, lay people will have to take up not only a great deal of the administration but also their rightful part as co-workers with the priests in the task of evangelisation and other ministries. There is no doubt that the Diocese will change quite dramatically and, as I have said in a previous letter to you, the changes will demand a generosity and understanding on the part of priests and people. Having said that, I have every confidence that there will be much to celebrate and enjoy with purpose as we prepare our Diocese for this next stage of the mission to which Pope Francis has called us.

I will be meeting with all the priests of the Diocese in early February and relying on them, with their knowledge and experience of the Diocese, to begin the discussion and planning for this re-alignment of the parishes within the Diocese. Their proposals will be open to your comments and knowledge before any decisions are made.

Although there will be change, much will remain the same and so much of what is familiar will continue as before.

Finally, all this planning and change will be in the context of the Year of Mercy. What better place than this to examine where the Lord, in His love for us, may be leading us and to discover the commission that He may have for us? I am asking that we positively engage with change. Change is inevitable but we can take advantage of it and use it to respond to Pope Francis' call for a missionary church. We can create now a renewed Church in Salford that future generations will be grateful we shaped for them.

Our prayer must play an important part in all we hope to do and, as we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, let us continue with that prayer that Christ Himself will "Stay with us on our journey" .

Yours devotedly



+ John Arnold
Bishop of Salford