



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

*To be read in all Churches on the weekend of 27th/28th October 2018,
the 30th Sunday of the year.*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In Luke's Gospel we read "The harvest indeed is great but the labourers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send labourers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2).

I firmly believe that God has a definite purpose for each one of us. Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman was convinced that God has committed some work to each one of us that He has not committed to another. We can all say, in his words, "I have my mission". Discerning that mission, or vocation, God will call as many men to the priesthood as are needed, and men and women to religious life. We must do all that we can to ensure that those who are called are listening and we must also be sure that the priesthood and consecrated life to which they commit themselves are appropriate for the needs of today's Church, as envisaged by the Second Vatican Council. The Council was greatly concerned with that sense of mission and evangelisation that Pope Francis constantly emphasises in his letters and communications to the Church. As "missionary disciples" we are all invited to use our gifts in growing and strengthening our parish communities and taking our Faith out to the wider community in service of all, particularly the marginalised and the poor. With our pastoral programme Hope in the Future I believe that we are making good progress to develop and strengthen that sense of mission. Within that mission, the priest has a specific role.

Over the last four years I have resisted any use of the phrase "shortage of priests" in this Diocese because, compared with just about every country in the world, we have a good number of priests for what is, geographically, a small Diocese. But we are certainly seeing a reduction in the number of priests in pastoral ministry and this will continue as we see more priests retiring than those being ordained. In the last four years 24 priests have retired in this Diocese and seven have died in active ministry. Those thirty one priests have been replaced by six newly ordained and the transfer of one priest into the Diocese. This imbalance is clearly estimated to continue in the next few years.

The essential role of the priest is to provide sacraments to a parish community in the celebration of the Eucharist, Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. He is the lead pastor who, with the assistance of lay ministers, ensures that there is care for the sick and the elderly of the parish community, for all those in any particular spiritual need, and catechesis for the young and on-

going Faith formation for the whole community. He is the spiritual father of the community with a ministry of prayer for the people and for preaching the Word of God.

Any man, young or not so young, may hear a call to priesthood in a great variety of ways. He may feel drawn to priesthood by the example of a priest that he knows. He may discern a call to priestly service through his reading, prayer, thinking, or work experience. He may also benefit from the idea being suggested to him by another. That was certainly an important factor in my own life when, as a young schoolboy, a priest made the suggestion to me that sowed a seed in my own thinking. It is important that we recognise that the vocation to the priesthood is not something that just happens to someone, somewhere else. It must come from within our parishes and schools and families and we need to nurture the conversation that allows for priestly vocation to be spoken about and encouraged.

I would like to challenge the young men in our parishes to ask themselves if it is possible that God is calling them to priesthood. Are there young men and women called to religious life? I would like to challenge everyone to consider if they know of men and women who they believe have the qualities for such service in the Church. Would they have the courage to suggest that to them? And I would ask that we all make a fresh commitment to pray for vocations: that those whom God may be calling may hear that call and respond, with our active encouragement.

Service as a priest does, in my own experience and in my knowledge of others, bring a great sense of fulfilment and happiness. It can be very demanding but it is packed with privileged moments of service to people in the most important moments of their lives. To join couples in marriage, to baptise new lives, to forgive in God's name are a gift and joy. To walk with others in their time of bereavement or illness is humbling. I am so very grateful for priests in my life who have been the presence of Christ to me by their kindness and encouragement. I am sure that many would share that sense of gratitude. The call to religious life also brings great fulfilment as men and women dedicate themselves to a particular quality of the Gospel, such as in teaching, nursing or care for the elderly - in the very deliberate sense of mission to others.

Thank you for your care for and appreciation of the priests and religious of this Diocese. As we continue to develop our sense of mission in parishes, schools and family life, let us be sure to remove tasks from our priests and religious that can be done by others so that they may attend to all that they are specifically ordained and consecrated to do. Let us ask in our daily prayer that the Lord will prompt and urge men and women to respond to His call so that, by their service, our Church may grow in its mission - making Christ ever more clearly present in our world

Stay with us, Lord, on our journey

With my prayers and thanks for you, my brothers and sisters

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+John". The plus sign is small and positioned to the left of the name.

+John Arnold
Bishop of Salford