



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

*Pastoral Letter of
The Right Reverend Terence J Brain
Bishop of Salford*

Dear Family of God

Six years ago I began my ministry as your bishop and one of my main tasks has been to prepare the diocese to go into the new millennium with a belief in the call of God, through Jesus Christ, to be his people: and to lay the first foundations for this new era. This has been the purpose of engaging you all in the *Faith in the Future* process with its two questions:

- What is the mission of the Church?
- What resources do we need to enable that mission?

Arising from our discussions, it is obvious that the building blocks for our missionary activity (proclaiming the good news by word and action) are our parishes throughout the diocese, grouped together in areas called Deaneries. So, if we are to be strong and robust missionaries in the future, we need to ensure that the parishes in the diocese are vibrant communities that enable us to be “people of prayer” prepared to reach out to others and proclaim, by example and word, the Gospel message. In reality our parishes are not always this way.

A significant number were built to serve new housing estates at a time when towns and cities were expanding and Church membership was high. Nowadays with shifting populations and a decline in the number attending Mass, we often find the churches are half empty and some are in the wrong place. We also need to recognise the number of priests available to serve in the diocese is less than in the past. (In the three years we have been praying and working at *Faith in the Future* the diocese has 40 less priests).

At this stage of the process, having looked at our priorities and strengths, we needed to address some very practical questions about our parishes and our buildings. First we have re-ordered some of the Deaneries, changing their boundaries so that parishes are better supported and priests more able to work collaboratively with each other. This should create new energy for clergy.

Secondly, throughout the diocese in most towns and cities there are churches which have a special place in the hearts of the local people – churches like St Mary’s, Mulberry Street – the Hidden Gem. These churches are places where we specially seek out the Lord for nourishment in our spiritual lives. This is a long standing custom and one I encourage you to build on. So some of our churches will be designated as “Gem Churches” and the local parishes will be encouraged to find ways in which we can use these Gem Churches together to better become a People of Prayer.

Thirdly, a few churches will close and the parish boundaries will be redrawn so that every house is still served by a particular priest. Some parishes will be asked to amalgamate with another, which will mean keeping its church but maybe without a resident priest, and working together until sometime in the future years, it is time again to consider how best to enable the mission of these parishes. Also, all parishes, (those with redrawn boundaries, those which have been amalgamated and those which have not been effected by these actions), will be clustered together; which will mean working in common wherever this is an advantage. This will create new energy in our parishes. The whole exercise mirrors the Gospel image of digging round the vine and pruning it to bring new fruit from a healthy plant.

These changes will be made available through the Deans, who have been instructed to work with the priests and people in their areas to begin locally to implement this Development Framework, which will proceed in different ways and at different speeds throughout the diocese. We need to have a strategy to help us plan ahead – initially for the next ten years – and this will be our framework.

As you receive this Pastoral Letter, I am about to travel to Rome with the other bishops of England and Wales. We are going for our five-yearly *Ad Limina* visit during which each bishop gives an account of his diocese to the Holy Father and the various Vatican officials responsible for oversight of the different aspects of Church life. Whilst we are there, John Paul II will be celebrating his 25th anniversary as Pope on Thursday, 16th October: he will also beatify Mother Teresa of Calcutta next Sunday, and hold the Consistory for the new Cardinals on Tuesday 21 October. Hold him in your prayers and try to go to mass on Thursday to pray in thanksgiving for God’s loving mercy in giving John Paul to the Church.

These events serve to remind us that the Church in Salford is part of a bigger picture of the Church throughout the world. Yet it is through attending to our own situation and making sure we are ready for the future that we will best make our contribution to the work of the Church in the world. So, I ask you to embrace willingly the changes, which are necessary for the future of our diocese. Together, through prayer and collaboration, we can build strong and vibrant communities that will serve the Church in Salford Diocese for many years to come. Take heart from the words of the First Reading at mass today:

*“ I prayed, and understanding was given to me;
I entreated, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me.”*
Wisdom 7:7

+ Terence
Bishop of Salford

*Given at Wardley Hall on 7th October 2003
the Feast of the Our Lady of the Rosary
and appointed to be read in all chapels and churches of the Diocese
on the weekend of 11/12 October 2003, the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time*