



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 April, 2018,
Good Shepherd Sunday.*

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is important that I write to you again about various 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 or listen to it again on the diocesan website.

This weekend, the fourth Sunday of Easter, we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. In the Gospel reading that we hear proclaimed today, Jesus describes his relationship with his followers as similar to the relationship between a good shepherd and his sheep. As a good shepherd will risk and lay down his life in order to protect his sheep, Jesus willingly sacrifices himself for the sake of his flock. He declares that he gives himself so readily out of love for each and every one of those entrusted to him.

In a further chapter of John's Gospel Jesus charges Peter to "Feed my Sheep." (*Jn 21:17*) This request by Jesus brings us to the second theme for this Sunday, namely Vocations Sunday. In the challenging times in which we live, we pray for the leaders of our Church and hope that they will be able to speak words that will resonate with those making decisions that will have a lasting impact on the future of our planet and all living on it as well as future generations to come.

We pray for those who have heard and responded to God's call and are following in the footsteps of Peter and the Apostles, for priests and religious and for those who are in the process of discerning what God is asking of them. Today we especially think of our Seminarians who have answered the call and are working towards the fulfillment of that call in priestly ordination. We currently have six men in seminary and, God willing, I will ordain one of them in July. Another will be ordained deacon in Rome and the others are at various stages of their training and we have two possible candidates waiting to start training in September. These are not the huge numbers from days gone by but we are fortunate to have a steady stream of capable and genuine young men willing to respond to what God is asking of them.

However, it is not just our seminarians and candidates who need to respond to what God is asking of them. Each and every one of us has a vocation and we must ask ourselves today *what am I doing to build up the Body of Christ in my parish, my local community and, consequently, in our shared world.*

Through our Hope in the Future initiative we have the opportunity to look at what we are doing to witness to our Faith in all aspects of our daily life and our interactions with those around us. Having over the past year reviewed and celebrated what we are already achieving, we are now preparing to move to the next stage where we will discern the gifts and talents that we have and how best we might use these in the service of others. In this way we can become the missionary disciples that Pope Francis asks us to be. This will mean that 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.

God is calling all of us individually and collectively to work for the Gospel. For a small number it may be as a priest or religious – and that call can come at any time in one's life. But there are many ways of serving the Church and helping to build up the Christian community. I challenge you today to ask yourself "Where is God calling me to make my own unique contribution based on the particular talents God has given me?"

As we continue with the practical challenge of consolidating the parishes, 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. I thank all those who have embraced the changes so far, priests who have agreed so readily to moves and parishes for welcoming them so warmly. Although there will be change, much will remain the same and so much of what is familiar will continue as before.

Our prayer must play an important part in all we hope to do. Please pray for vocations, for our seminarians, our priests and religious and for each other, as we continue with this important mission. Let us continue with that prayer that Christ Himself will "Stay with us on our journey".

Yours devotedly

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ John". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

+ John Arnold
Bishop of Salford