

**Pastoral Letter of the Archbishop of Liverpool to be read at
all Masses celebrated on the twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time.
Saturday 30 September / Sunday 1 October 2017**

Dear friends,

In the Gospel we have just heard a call is made and we are offered two contrasting responses. God calls us and each one of us is invited to respond.

I know that every day across the parishes of our diocese people are generously responding to God's call. The compassion of Christ is being experienced by so many through the ministry of our priests and people. We are truly very blessed.

In recent years, however, we have had to begin to consider what it means to be called by God in changing times. The Leaving Safe Harbours process sought to help us to hear this call amidst the many challenges facing us. I want to thank all those who, in spite of frustrations, gave so generously of their time and energy. But we cannot stop there, we must continue to build on that good work. I recently wrote to all the priests to help me to reflect on how to respond to the fall in numbers of priests and people at Mass.

From the feedback that the Deans gave me it is clear that we need to respond to the call being made with a particular focus. The call of Jesus is always to go out, to be missionary, to make disciples. What does it mean for us to be true to that call today?

In the light of this I want us to embark upon a 3 year journey of prayer, reflection and action that will culminate in a Diocesan Synod in 2020. The Synod will look at practical ways in which we as a Diocese respond to God's call today and in the future.

The first part of our journey will be a year of prayer leading to the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage and Congress which will be held in Liverpool next year.

From the 7th to 9th September 2018 10,000 delegates from around the country will be gathering in Liverpool to participate in events in and around the city that will focus us on Christ, the bread of life. Through adoration, talks, workshops, keynote speakers, Masses and other activities we will be given the chance to reflect on how our adoration of Christ in the Eucharist nourishes our lives as disciples.

Focusing our gaze firmly on Christ is an excellent place to begin our own journey towards Synod 2020. In this coming year therefore, resources such as prayer cards and holy hours will be made available for each parish to take up this journey and I will be coming to each Pastoral Area to lead a Holy Hour.

In the second year of our journey to Synod 2020, parish discussions will take place, which will begin from the fact that we are not about managing decline, but we are trying to catch a vision that will move us forward towards missionary discipleship, so that we do not simply follow Jesus but we take the Gospel message to others.

Year 3 will culminate in the Synod itself, to be held in the summer of 2020. The Synod will present practical ways in which we as a Diocese can respond to the call of God. Like the Gospel there are at least 2 ways of responding, we can try to look at ourselves and the problems we face, or we can accept the challenge of every call of Jesus to be missionary and outward looking.

I would like to share with you two recent developments that illustrate this way of responding to the call of Christ today. In the city of Liverpool I have invited the missionaries of Africa, more commonly

known as the White Fathers, to take over the pastoral care of one of our parishes. They will be setting up a mission to specifically respond to the needs of our African brothers and sisters, and others of various ethnic origins, in the city. I will also be giving a parish church, hall and presbytery to the Syro-Malabar community who will embrace a similar mission to part of our Indian community.

In these two examples of our changing church, we glimpse something of what it might be like to hear and respond to the call of the Lord to look outwards, beyond our own concerns and needs. We need to regain our missionary spirit so that the call to holiness we heard in our baptism is expressed by a change of direction. Baptism has changed us so that as Christians we live no longer for ourselves but for others.

Perhaps we can also begin to see the opportunity that Synod 2020, our 3-year journey of prayer, reflection and action, might bring us to hear and respond to the call of the Lord with openhearted generosity and creative commitment. It is in this spirit that we can face the future with hope and confidence in Christ who is always close to those who seek to do his will.

Be assured of my prayers for you and your families,

Most Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP
Archbishop of Liverpool