

**Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney
Bishop of Nottingham**

**Pastoral Letter appointed to be read out at all Masses celebrated on
Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th November 2018.**

31st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I've been your bishop for three years now, and you all know the situation facing us in the diocese. We don't have enough priests to go around, and so there will need to be more clustering of parishes served by just one priest. This will inevitably mean a reduction in the number of weekend Masses, and possibly some closures of Mass centres. That said, I genuinely remain very positive about what I see happening in our diocesan parishes, schools and chaplaincies. There is the potential for our diocese to become more and more outward-looking and missionary in its sense of purpose and direction. How will this happen? By ensuring that we have a strong spiritual foundation for all that we seek to do across our diocese, because as the psalmist reminds us, "unless the Lord build the house, in vain do its builders labour" (Ps. 127)

So, the spiritual foundation for the diocese that I would like to see put firmly in place over the next three years is three-fold: **ENCOUNTER, DISCIPLESHIP** and **MSSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP**.

- First of all, **ENCOUNTER**: I would like to ensure that people of all ages in our parishes, schools, and chaplaincies are helped to discover, or discover more deeply, the importance of a personal **ENCOUNTER** with Christ; so that they can become convinced that they are each loved by God and are invited to grow in their relationship with him. In particular I would like to see the development of times of Eucharistic Adoration in our parishes, schools and chaplaincies.
- Secondly, **DISCIPLESHIP**: because of that personal encounter with Christ, I would like to encourage each of us to hear and respond to his invitation to be his **DISCIPLES**, to follow him more closely, and to seek to serve him generously in our daily lives.
- Thirdly, **MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP**: that, with a greater recognition of, and openness to, the help, guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can all become **MISSIONARY DISCIPLES**; faith-filled, joyful and outward-looking Christians who are growing in confidence to speak humbly of the difference that knowing Christ makes to our lives, and who bear witness to His love in our service of our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. The service to which Christ calls us is always the action of the Holy Spirit working in us.

Each year, over the next three years, we will try to deepen our understanding of, and our response to, these core spiritual themes. I wish to emphasise that this is not just another diocesan plan. These themes remind us of what Jesus asks of his disciples, “Go, make disciples of all nations; they remind us that the Church is called to be missionary.

So, beginning this year, we will explore in our schools, parishes and chaplaincies the theme of ‘Encounter’ during Advent and Christmas, ‘Discipleship’ during Lent, and ‘Missionary Discipleship’ from Easter to Pentecost. I would love to see these spiritual themes become more and more a living reality in each of our lives, and in the life of the whole diocese. Resources have already been produced for our schools, and some initial resources for our parishes and chaplaincies will be ready by Advent. Other materials will later be produced to help us to examine how our schools, parishes and chaplaincies can become more and more outward looking, more missionary and engaged with the wider community through practical acts of service and outreach. Because when we truly encounter the Lord and his love for each of us, and hear afresh each day his Gospel invitation to change our lives and follow him as his disciples, we will find that we want to share with others the difference that knowing and serving Christ makes to our lives. In these ways I really want mission to become the heart of, and the motivation for, everything that we seek to do throughout the diocese. The call to evangelise, to be missionary is never then just some diocesan programme that we have all decided we will try and do, but rather it is the result of a change of heart and mind, of having encountered Christ and responded to his call. Pope Francis has described it well:

‘Thanks, solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelisation. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?’(The Joy of the Gospel, 8)

Why do I believe this foundational encounter with the Lord is so important and needs such emphasising? Because without it, we cannot become effective disciples. If we ourselves have not allowed the Lord to invite us into his friendship and to guide our lives through his Holy Spirit, then how can we speak of this to others? It has been my experience over forty years of pastoral ministry that many Catholics dismiss such talk of a personal encounter or relationship with Christ as something Protestant, and so somehow alien to Catholicism. However, the truth is that the development of a personal relationship with Christ is absolutely central to a Catholic understanding of faith. This is what the General Directory for Catechesis teaches:

“The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, making of oneself his disciple. This demands a permanent commitment to think like him, to judge like him and to live as he lived. In this way the believer unites himself or herself to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church. This ‘Yes’ to Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of the revelation of the Father, is twofold: a trustful abandonment to God, and a loving assent to all that he has revealed to us. This is possible only by the action of the Holy Spirit.” (General Directory for Catechesis, 53, 54)

I also believe that we can be helped to see each of the sacraments as opportunities for personal encounters with the Lord, as heart to heart moments; times when we are each invited to encounter the loving heart of the Lord, truly present and active in these sacraments, who wishes to encounter us as we open our hearts to him. I also think that too many young people, and people of all ages, continue to drift away from the Church for a variety of reasons. I’m convinced that one of these reasons is that they have never been encouraged and helped to develop a personal relationship with Christ.

So, I ask each of you to join with me, over the next three years, in accepting the challenge of the Gospel to root our lives more firmly in Christ, through engaging generously with these three spiritual themes of Encounter, Discipleship and Missionary Discipleship.

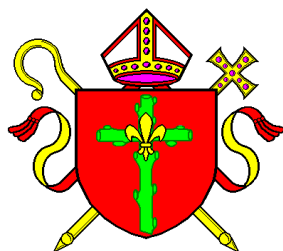
I'm convinced this will help us to face and respond better to the challenges we face as a diocese. Why? Because we will be seeking to know and do God's will for our diocese and, as we know, "unless the Lord build the house, in vain do its builders labour".

May Advent and Christmas be a time when we all encounter afresh the amazing love of God our Father in sending us his Son, and ponder again on Mary's openness to receiving that love.

With my prayers and good wishes,

+ Patrick

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Bishop's House - Nottingham
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