



DECLAN BISHOP OF CLIFTON

BISHOP DECLAN'S PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE WEEKEND OF THE 2ND/3RD SEPTEMBER 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

For many people September rather than January is the beginning of a new year. The reason for this is that Schools and Universities begin a new academic year which effects not only the academic population but has a bearing on family life and the volume of traffic on the roads. I would like to thank our teachers, governors, ancillary staff, parents and of course the pupils and students for making our schools places of learning in a Christian environment. In all things we are called to have the mind of Christ and to worship God in a way that is worthy of human beings.

This September is also a time of change in our Diocese. We are replacing the present 13 deaneries into 9 pastoral areas which will be led by the dean of each particular area. The reason for this is not for a bureaucratic purpose but to make more effective the mission of our diocese to the wider community. We are called to collaborate in this task. In this we will discover the will of God and know what is good.

Each of the pastoral areas will be named after a Saint of our Diocese. I hope you will be inspired by these people who have lived the Christian life in a previous time and have dedicated their lives to the Kingdom of God.

As well as renewing parish pastoral councils we need to revitalise deanery pastoral councils and a diocesan pastoral council. On October 7th, at St Bernadette's School, Whitchurch there is to be a diocesan day which will inform and guide us with the formation of these various councils. There will be a series of group conversation. David Wells will help us to focus on the purpose of the day.

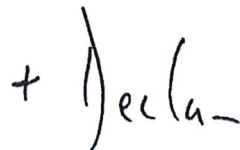
The task of the councils is to identify the needs of the wider community as well as the church community and to respond as best they can to meet those needs. This includes chaplaincy, schools, universities, hospitals, and prisons. As I have said many times if we are inward looking, we will die but if we are outward looking, we will be challenged but we will live and know that we are faithful to the Gospel.

The preparation for the Synod on Synodality which opens in October, has shown us the importance of listening to one another. In listening we show respect and often are enriched by what we hear. The councils should be places of listening to the Word of God, listening to one another rather than promoting a particular cause or idea of what we think others should be doing or thinking.

In the Gospel today Peter is not really listening to Jesus because he does not like what Jesus is saying. We too can be like Peter wanting to hear our own words rather than the Word of God who is Jesus who makes visible the presence of God the Father and promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is life to the Church and enables the mission of the Church in ways that can be unexpected. We are all disciples following Jesus and discovering the meaning of the Kingdom of God. We are all learners called to deepen our relationship with God through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit who renews our lives and the face of the earth.

The proposed changes in our diocesan life is a continuation of what we reflected upon in consideration of Mission, Communion and Prayer. The fruit of those reflections is contained within 'Called to be a People of Hope' and 'Parishes in Communion for Mission'. Pope Francis calls us to deepen our understanding of communion, participation and mission which is similar to our reflections.

I look forward to meeting some of you at the diocesan day and hope to see many of you in schools and parishes throughout the coming Academic Year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Declan" with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Rt Rev Declan Lang
Bishop of Clifton

To be read and made available in all
Churches and Chapels in the Clifton Diocese
on the weekend of the 2nd / 3rd September 2023.

This pastoral letter is also available in video and audio from our website
cliftondiocese.com