



Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney

Bishop of Nottingham

Pastoral Letter

**appointed to be read at all Sunday Masses celebrated in the Diocese of Nottingham
on Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th February 2022; 7th Sunday of Ordinary Time**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to you today about two important initiatives, taking place across the diocese, which will help shape our diocesan Mission Plan: the reorganisation of deaneries for mission and the Synodal process.

The reorganisation of deaneries for mission

In the autumn of 2018 I wrote a Pastoral Letter setting out three key spiritual themes, 'encounter', 'discipleship', and 'missionary discipleship'. These themes continue to underpin the three pastoral priorities I have for our diocese: to help children and young people to encounter God's love and to become active disciples of Christ Jesus in the life and mission of the Church; to offer support and formation to parishioners to enable them to be confident agents of missionary discipleship, both within their parish and wider society; and thirdly, ongoing support for our clergy to free them up to be pastors, leaders and enablers of mission.

Since then I have asked my two Vicars General to work with the Deans, clergy and parish representatives of our deanery groupings of parishes to draft a plan to reorganise the deaneries. This draft plan seeks to help our parishes, schools, and chaplaincies to be better supported in becoming more outward looking and missionary, while also striving to ensure that the fewer priests now available for active ministry across the diocese are best able to serve our communities. Those deanery discussions were well advanced in some areas of the diocese when the pandemic struck in March 2020 and covid restrictions meant that in-person meetings were not encouraged. Towards the end of last year this deanery exercise began again in earnest. In just a few days' time I will begin a journey around the deaneries for a series of evening 'roadshow' events. I will be accompanied by the two Vicars General, the Chief Operating Officer of the diocese and the Episcopal Vicar for Finance and Administration. At each deanery 'roadshow' we will meet with parish representatives and clergy. This will be an opportunity for me, and those who work most closely with me, to present the reasons for the proposed reorganisation of our deaneries. It will also be an occasion to explain the support that is being put in place to enable this to happen, to listen carefully to the discussion, and to answer questions. These evenings will help shape the necessary reorganisation now needed in each deanery, to both enable the whole diocese to become more missionary and to respond creatively to the declining numbers of parishioners and priests. Even if you are not going to be directly involved in your local 'roadshow' event, please do keep these important discussions in your prayers. These will continue throughout Lent and a full report of each 'roadshow' will be made available.

The Diocesan Synodal Process

Last year Pope Francis announced that the 2023 Synod of Bishops would be on the theme ‘For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission’, and that each diocese throughout the world would now be invited to contribute to the process. Last October, in my Pastoral Letter on the Synod, and in my Letters to the young people in our schools, I encouraged everyone to look upon this initiative, as Pope Francis does, as first and foremost a spiritual process: an invitation to pray, to listen to the Holy Spirit and to each other, and to dream about the Church the Holy Spirit is calling us to become. I am very grateful that, in spite of covid restrictions, many parishes, schools, and chaplaincies have generously taken part in this process, whether through parish meetings, conversations after Masses, classroom discussions, or by paper or online responses to questionnaires. Since the New Year these responses and practical initiatives have been shared at the level of the deanery, so that those gathered together in prayer might discern which one or two proposed initiatives of outreach and mission the deanery would pledge to work on together. These responses are presently being collated into the interim diocesan report. In the short time available to us as a diocese, we have tried not only to express and listen together to our dreams for the Church, but also to identify some practical outcomes that our parishes, schools, chaplaincies and deaneries could begin to work upon.

This Tuesday evening, the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, I will be presiding at a special celebration of Evening Prayer at our Cathedral in Nottingham; each deanery will be asked to come and share something of the fruits, so far, of the Synodal process within their parishes, chaplaincies and schools. So from across the diocese representatives will gather in the Cathedral, and everyone else is warmly invited to join in virtually by means of the livestream which can be found on the Cathedral’s website. The interim diocesan report will be distributed that evening to everyone present, and then made more widely available. There will be a period for ongoing reflection upon the report until 19th March, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Guardian of the Church, during which any further responses can be sent to our Synod leads, Father David Cain and Joe Hopkins (whose contact details are at the end of this letter, and in the parish newsletter this Sunday). The final diocesan report, like that of every diocese in England and Wales, has to be sent to the Bishops’ Conference secretariat by 8th April. It will then be collated into the Bishops’ Conference Synod Report. Both reports will be made widely available. On the Thursday of Pentecost week we will gather again in the Cathedral to share how the parish and deanery initiatives are progressing. In this way it is hoped that the Synodal process of listening, dreaming, and then acting will continue on in our diocese.

Our diocesan reorganisation of deaneries, so as to enable and strengthen mission, and our response to the Synod, are processes that are very much inter-connected. Together they will help shape our next steps as a diocese in genuine renewal and a stronger sense of missionary purpose. Please join me in asking the Holy Spirit to inspire, guide and bless all our diocesan initiatives as we strive to become the Church God is calling us to be.

You are very much in my prayers, please remember me in yours,

+ Patrick

Bishop of Nottingham

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