



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

*To be read in all parishes on the weekend of 2nd & 3rd March 2019
the Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Season of Lent begins in just a few days and calls us to reflect on our Faith and to make resolutions about how we might put our Faith into action in more practical ways. Often this invites us to private reflection about personal routines of prayer, fasting and alms-giving. I would ask that this year we look beyond personal lives, to our role within our wider communities and to the voice of the Church in our world.

In preparation for Lent this year I am writing to you about a very urgent matter about which I think most of us are at least aware but we have not yet recognised the need to make a practical response. I speak about Climate Change and our care for the environment of our planet. We have been fortunate, thus far, in experiencing only relatively minor evidence of Climate Change in the United Kingdom. But even here we have experienced freak weather conditions which are clear evidence of changes to our climate. We have had unprecedented floods which have destroyed homes and livelihoods, seasonal changes and the so-called Beast from the East. Elsewhere in our world severe and long term droughts, floods, rising sea-levels and extreme record-breaking temperatures are clear evidence of the damage that our actions and our way of life are inflicting on our world. These have affected millions of people, most often in the poorest countries of the world and people who have done least to damage our environment.

This is not a problem that we can just leave to governments to remedy. They must certainly play their part and we must pray that the recent Conferences in Paris and Poland have done something to unite nations in a common endeavour. But Pope Francis tells us that we are all required, every one of us, to make changes to our lives and begin to repair the damage before matters become irreversible. I am sure that a growing number of people are aware of these problems but all too many of us are not engaging in those practical actions which are required in order to make the essential difference.

You might well ask why the Bishop is speaking to us about Climate Change when we are gathered for Mass on Sunday. I am writing because Pope Francis is leading the way in calling us to be aware of what we have done to our world and the certainty that, without immediate and sustained action, we will inflict irreparable damage on our planet which will adversely affect the lives of our children and our children's children. This is most certainly a matter which is rooted in our Faith. Creation is God's gift to us and we are called to be stewards of creation. But for all too long we have exploited our world

and its resources, often in ignorance as to the consequences, having no regard for the impact of our actions. But now we are coming to understand what we have done and we have time to correct the damage, if we act quickly.

A great deal of difference can be made through a number of small actions in our personal lives. To name a few: We can shop more carefully, particularly choosing local produce, so saving the expensive transportation costs and use of fuel. We can cut the temperature on our central heating (perhaps wearing a pullover around our home). We can walk more and use less petrol, using public transport more regularly. We can turn lights off in unused rooms, hang washing out to dry rather than using energy-expensive drying machines. We can reduce the waste we make and recycle more. These may seem almost trivial but they are significant ways where we can make an impact for the good. We show the goodness of our faith by our actions.

We can also spread the word among family and friends so that everyone comes to understand their role and their responsibilities. I would like to challenge every parish in this Diocese to form a group concerned with giving advice and making practical responses. I invite every parish to watch "Global Healing" as an introduction to practical ways of helping to heal our planet. I challenge this Diocese to take the lead in Pope Francis' call to healing our planet. Let's make the Diocese of Salford a flagship for ways to heal and care for our common home. We are beginning a major environmental project in the grounds of Wardley Hall and, since this is such an important matter, I have also written a letter to all our schools asking our young people to find ways to involve their school communities in our efforts.

I would always like to think that, as the Bishop of the Diocese, I can always encourage and express hope. I believe that, thanks to the advances of science, we have discovered the reasons for Climate Change and we still have time to correct our ways. We know that we have caused the extinction of thousands of species. We are changing the seasons by our destruction of the rain forests and we have plundered our natural resources for profit. We have caused the melting of the icecaps, the severe droughts, the freak storms, the variations of the seasons upon which agriculture and food production depend. We have caused people in coastal regions to lose their livelihoods through rising sea levels. But, with our commitment and our common participation, we can slow the destruction of the environment and begin to correct our mistakes. There is still time but unless we achieve significant progress in the next 12 years, our scientists are certain that our future generations will suffer life-changing consequences with no means of turning the clock back.

And in our determination and endeavours, let us remember that we are not walking alone. The gift of the Spirit ensures that we have the strength to do what is right. There is no doubt that we face a human catastrophe but by our determination we can heal the damage, mend our planet and "care for our common home" for future generations.

"Stay with us, Lord, on our journey"

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

✠ John Arnold

Bishop of Salford