



Pastoral Letter
to be read at all Masses on
the First Sunday of Advent
26 and 27 November 2022

My dear friends,

The Advent season begins with words of invitation. We are invited to “come up to the mountain of the Lord”; we are encouraged to be “filled with joy as we go to God’s house” in the psalm. St Paul writing to the Romans invites us to live as “people of the light” and in the Gospel Jesus asks us to “stay awake” – be ready.

These words set the theme until our celebration of the birth of the Lord at Christmas. So, I invite you to enter this time with joy. How can we do that amid so much hardship and turmoil? We can do it because of our confidence that our incarnate God walks with us. We are not on our own.

This weekend marks the first anniversary of our Pastoral Plan which was the fruit of our Synod journey. As we have come to understand that a Synod is not a one-off event so neither is a pastoral plan. It is an invitation to discover what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church – an invitation to become the church that God is calling us to be.

This fact is echoed in the document published last month for the Vatican Synod of Bishops. It is the continental stage of the worldwide Synod, and the title of the document is: “enlarge the space of your tent.” This quote from the prophet Isaiah is a reminder to us that our Synod asked us to look outward – to be welcoming – to be inclusive, to enlarge our tent.

This is not easy. One of the great gifts of the Vatican document is that it does not shy from difficult conversations and issues. If it were easy, we would have implemented everything from our Synod by now – we haven't. We are learning what it means to be a synodal church, a synodal diocese. The Vatican document says that we must learn to allow synodality to change the way we work at every level. This is not easy for any of us.

In the twelve months since the Pastoral Plan was launched, we have taken some important steps. Deanery Synodal Councils are meeting. Their main task is to set up Families of Parishes, where we can work together to share the mission of Christ. In the Autumn next year, we hope to have the first meeting of our Diocesan Synodal Council. We are learning new ways of listening. I have changed my main advisory body so that it can now include the voice of women and lay men. I have been delighted in the way we as a diocese have reached out to the local church in Ukraine and how we are now responding to the need for people to be warm and safe this winter. Our priests have been reflecting together on what it means to be a priest now and, in the years, to come. This has been done because you said in the Synod that you wanted us to find new ways of supporting our priests and deacons. We are exploring new ways of working and formation that will help us face a very challenging future. Next month we hope to employ a youth and young adult minister to help us shape our work with young people and young adults into the future.

On Monday I will be meeting with members of our Deanery Synodal Councils so that we can reflect together on the Vatican document. I want to listen to them before I make the response asked of me as your bishop. This way of working fills me with great hope – a church of co-responsibility, where the baptismal vocation of everyone is recognised and valued, where the voice of everyone is heard as we discern the way ahead.

In the weeks to come, as you prepare for Christmas, allow John the Baptist to re-ignite the flame of your baptism, to reflect on what it means for you to be a disciple of Christ. As you accompany your family, friends, colleagues, and parishioners towards the feast be aware of the needs of those around you and of our sisters and brothers across the world.

Thank you for hearing again the words of invitation – take them with you today, share them with others; then our hearts, our Diocese, will be more ready than ever to welcome the Christ child, the God who lives amongst us.

May God bless you and your families,

A handwritten signature in black ink. It begins with a cross symbol (+) followed by the name 'Malcol' in a cursive script. The signature is written on a plain white background.

Archbishop of Liverpool