

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

PASTORAL LETTER
for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King
26th November 2023

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King and reflect on the ways in which we build His Kingdom of justice, love and peace, our first thoughts will be with the people of Gaza and Ukraine in these times of conflict. Let us continue to pray for peace across the world, that those in positions of worldly power will seek opportunities for an end to conflict and the diplomatic effort that will be needed to ensure the peace.

Jesus' call to welcome the stranger must surely prompt us to recognise the dignity of every person around us and do what we can to ensure that tensions do not arise in our own localities. This same call must prompt us to continue our welcome to the refugee and the asylum seeker. Our Diocesan Refugee Project is an expression of this and the outreach to those in the Detention Centres at Gatwick continues to be important. Around the Diocese there are other initiatives supporting refugees and I am grateful to all who are involved in this work in support of our vulnerable brothers and sisters.

This focus on the building of the Kingdom prompts us to reflect on our response to the Lord's call to us, a call that begins in Baptism.

The vocation of all the baptised – to holiness and to the spreading of the message of salvation to the whole world – is the most wonderful privilege and brings with it serious responsibility and great joy. This is the call given by the Lord prior to His Ascension: "Go, make disciples of all nations." In all things we are guided by the Holy Spirit, promised by the Lord and whose coming marked the beginning of the Church's Mission.

We must be prepared for this Mission through prayer and through the formation in faith that will give us the understanding and the confidence to use the gifts we have all been given in the service of God and of our brothers and sisters. This is also the call to holiness, for we are called not to keep the gift of our relationship with Christ to ourselves. We go from prayer to Mission and bring all back to Christ – most especially in our encounter with Him in the celebration of the Eucharist.

This Mission that is ours through baptism – and then through the specific expressions of vocation to which each is called – marriage and family, as religious, as priests and deacons, as those called to a vowed single life – must be the guiding principle in all we are and in all we do.

We strive to do this in the midst of the society in which the Lord has placed us, with all its opportunities and challenges – and in this particular moment in the life of the Church. This calls for new approaches and new structures that will enable lay faithful, religious and clergy to work together ever more closely. Those entrusted with the formation of our clergy and lay faithful will be providing the support necessary for our communities to embrace this time of change and the opportunities it presents.

In December, I shall be meeting with the clergy of the Diocese to present the third edition of the Pastoral Plan – “The Word Who is Life.” It will be published to the whole Diocese on 2nd January 2024. This is the fruit of much discernment and prayer and now is the time for action. The plan will outline the ways in which our Formation teams will work to support our communities and the clergy who serve them to develop collaborative mission. It will also outline the development towards the whole Diocese becoming a ‘community of communities’ and the structures needed to support this.

There has been much preparation for the work that lies ahead and we must all give thanks for the work of priests and deacons, the formation teams of the Diocese and the many people who serve our communities as members of parish core teams. I am especially grateful to all those who have taken part in the many meetings that have been held across the Diocese since the work of the Diocesan Plan began.

I ask you today to pray for the Diocese as we look to the future and to all that the Lord will ask of us. May we continue to be open to the Holy Spirit, that we shall embrace the changes that lie ahead to ensure the effectiveness and growth of our Diocesan family in the time to come.

With every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Richard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross at the beginning.