

ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF – ARCHESGOBAETH CAERDYDD



PASTORAL LETTER

FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - 28 NOVEMBER 2021

Dear Sisters & Brothers

Today is the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new year in the life of the Church. It is a season of hope and joy that the promise made by God through the prophets would be fulfilled. We believe that promise of a Messiah is fulfilled in abundance through the Incarnation of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. During this liturgical Year C we shall listen to extracts from the Gospel of Luke Sunday by Sunday. Luke teaches that all human beings are sinners and in need of salvation by Jesus Christ.

You will not need me to tell you that we have lived through an extraordinary year. It has been full of crisis and challenge for us all, personally and publicly, nationally and internationally. Every institution has been affected, not least the Church. Much of what we have traditionally taken for granted has been taken away or radically altered. The word 'crisis' has two meanings.

It is on the second meaning – that of opportunity – which I wish to reflect with you.

Pope Francis has invited the Church at large, its dioceses and parishes and people throughout the world, to join him in a synodical process by which we “Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches”(Revelation 3:22). He is summoning bishops of the world to a Synod in Rome in 2023 to receive their responses. In the meantime, the Holy Father has presented three headings under which he would like bishops, clergy and laity to reflect and respond. These are: **Communion, Participation, Mission.**

Ten questions have been prepared to explore these themes. The responses will undoubtedly influence the shape and pattern of parish, diocesan and Church life in the future.

So far, in the Archdiocese of Cardiff, seventy-six people from thirty parishes have volunteered as parish representatives for these discussions in their parishes. It is important that the remaining parishes nominate representatives too, so that they do not feel disenfranchised when proposals and decisions are made. Training and preparation has already begun by means of Zoom and there is a great deal of material to assist with the task. Parish responses will be co-ordinated by Diocesan representatives and presented to the Bishops Conference of England and Wales.

These responses will form part of our submission to Rome in preparation for the Synod.

This First Sunday of Advent also marks the official re-opening of our churches for full public worship following the pandemic.

I realise that “following the pandemic’ may be incorrect language. Nonetheless, many people have been anxious to return to Mass on a regular basis, recognising that whilst Live Streaming of services has been valuable, it does not replace the “Communion and Participation” of which Pope Francis speaks and in which we believe.

Other people are equally anxious about the prevalence of the virus and are hesitant about returning. Either way, vigilance and health and safety precautions will need to be part of the life of every church for some time to come. Lessons have been learnt which will stand us in good stead for the future.

“Honouring Sunday” is the name of a document published by the Bishops of England and Wales. It has been sent to each parish and is available either in the newsletter or on the parish website. It invites people to come back to Mass at the beginning of this new year. It gives the theological foundation for all the baptised members the Body of Christ to be one with Him and each other in the Communion of Faith. In the Archdiocese of Cardiff, I hope we shall express this by initiatives such as

“Welcome Home”

“Come Home for Christ”

& “The Light is on for You in Advent”.

I hope initiatives such as these will be a springboard towards inviting others back into a living relationship with the Church. This is the “Mission” which Pope Francis proposes in the forthcoming Synod.

With every blessing for the Seasons of Advent and Christmas.

With every blessing

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George Strach". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Metropolitan Archbishop of Cardiff
& Apostolic Administrator of Menevia