



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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A pastoral letter for the 17th & 18th June 2023

After all the high liturgies of Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and the Feasts of the Trinity and Corpus Christi, we return now to an extended period of Ordinary Time. From now until the beginning of next Advent our Gospel Readings will follow the account of Jesus' Public ministry as recounted by St Matthew. Today he tells us of Jesus' calling of twelve of his disciples to a particular mission that they are to embark upon. Theirs is to be one very important strand of his overall plan to have labourers for the great harvest of all peoples.

In these times I feel sure that it is relatively easy for people in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle to identify with the people in that Gospel passage who felt "harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd." A great deal of anger and hurt has been expressed by people over what has happened and this needs to be acknowledged, honoured and addressed. Jesus' concern for the people led him to choose twelve apostles for a special mission, but the mission belongs to all disciples: "missionary disciples", as Pope Francis likes to refer to all of us in the Church.

This is what I wish to address today.

Both the executive summary of the report, prepared on my behalf by Mrs Carol Lawrence, for the Dicastery of Bishops in Rome, and that of the National Safeguarding Review panel, into the events around the resignation of Bishop Byrne have now been published. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have responded to the invitations either to complete the questionnaire online, or who have had face-to-face meetings with those who have prepared the reports. There is much for all of us to learn and it is now time to move on to the next phase of the response to what has happened.

I believe that it will be both a useful and necessary exercise to come together, to share where we find ourselves individually and collectively and to look to the future. With that in mind I propose to set in motion a time of mutual listening, a "walking together and listening exercise" involving the whole diocese. Different approaches will be tailored to each section of the People of God in the diocese: priests, deacons, staff employed by the Diocese, the laity in parishes, school and Trust staff, and the religious. Each of these groups will be invited to take part via separate letters directed to each individual group.

In today's Second Reading St Paul homes in on the theme of reconciliation. He has not yet met the community in Rome, though he has met some of the members in other places. In this great letter of his he is introducing himself, and his credentials as an authentic preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, something he does not need to do in his other letters which are written to communities that he himself has evangelised and knows well. At the centre of his theology is the Crucified Christ through whose death we have been reconciled. Because of this, he writes, "... we are filled with joyful trust in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have already gained our reconciliation." "Trust" and "reconciliation" are vital to our mission of preaching the Gospel. Recent events in this diocese have dealt a heavy blow to these attributes, and we need to try to restore them.

As we await the installation of Bishop Stephen Wright as bishop of Hexham and Newcastle on 19 July 2023, our communities need a period of rebuilding, so I invite you to be generous in sharing where you are at as the people of God. This is why I invite, and urge, you to take part in this listening exercise for the whole diocese. Healing and rebuilding take time, prayer, and commitment.

My hope is that through walking together, understanding will grow of how to move forward individually and collectively, initiating the reconciliation and trust that should be the hallmarks of all Christian communities.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink. It begins with a simple cross symbol (+) followed by the name 'Malcolm' written in a cursive, flowing script.

Most Reverend Malcolm McMahon
Apostolic Administrator, Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
Archbishop of Liverpool