

## **A Pastoral Letter**

### ***On the Joy of our Youth***

To be read in all churches & chapels of the Diocese on 22nd Sunday of the Year,

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2017

My dear brothers and sisters

It has been a special joy to write to you several times this year with news of important developments in the mission of the Diocese. Today, I write to announce the launch of a *Youth Mission Team*. I am conscious this development has been made possible by the generosity and sacrifices of many thousands of people across the Diocese. The initiative 'Our Mission Together' has allowed for the appointment of three full-time members to form the core of a mission team who will set out to serve the whole of our Diocese.

I know this initiative has a special place in your hearts as I often hear you echo Saint John Paul II's words, that the joy and enthusiasm of the young is needed by us all. I frequently hear your appreciation of the witness of young people in our schools, and in many gatherings and initiatives in the Diocese and beyond, not least on our Annual Lourdes Pilgrimage. The witness of youth is a gift not only for those who are young – it is a gift needed by the whole Church and the whole world. Pope Francis speaks of the time of youth as "*the beautiful years*" – a time to discern God's call. The Holy Father urges us never to rob the young of this opportunity. It has certainly been one of the great joys of my own priestly life to have seen many young people re-discover their faith and the joy of their vocation.

Today, we are conscious of the challenges which confront young people in early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain. If these challenges are greater than in previous generations, then the assurance of God's grace is even more certain. When Blessed John Henry Newman reflected on the fragile beginnings of the 'Second Spring' of the Catholic Church in England he declared:

*"One thing alone I know, - that according to our need, so will be our strength"*  
(St Mary's Oscott, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1852).

I am conscious that I write on the day we remember Pope Saint Gregory the Great who sent the first missionaries to the English people. A year ago today, I ordained Father Tom Cunnah as a priest for the Diocese and reflected on how our mission is a continuation of that mission begun by a tiny group of Benedictine monks led by Saint Augustine. Our first missionaries feared their mission was doomed to failure - so fearsome was the reputation of the English people! Yet they would learn like Simon Peter in the Gospel, how they must depend not on themselves but on the wisdom and power of God, lest:

*“the way (we) think is not God’s way but man’s” (Mt 16: 23).*

The Prophet Jeremiah had expected nothing but *“insult and derision all the day long”* (Jer 20:8) yet saw how his mission depended not on favourable circumstances but on a fire already burning within his heart (cf Jer 20:0).

Pope Gregory had urged our first missionaries to have this same confidence by patiently persevering in the first evangelisation of this land. He wrote to them:

*“It is certainly impossible to eradicate all errors from obstinate minds at one stroke, whoever wishes to climb to a mountain top climbs gradually step by step, and not in one leap.”*

How truly this applies to our own mission today.

This Sunday, I ask your prayers for our Youth Mission Team as they take their first steps. I want to entrust this diocesan-wide mission to the prayers of Saint John Paul II, together with those of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati who reached the heights of holiness - true happiness - in their own young lives. May this initiative in our mission together, help renew the joy of our youth.

United with you in this prayer and this mission,

*+ Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury