

'Voices of Hope'

Pastoral Letter from Most Rev. Donal McKeown D.D.,

5th November 2023



St Paul, writing to guide, strengthen and support the growing Christian community in Ephesus, encouraged them all to reflect together on the nature of the Church, its various ministries and gifts, and to creatively consider how every individual could play their essential, unique and important part to grow and build up the Body of Christ.

'Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.'

(Eph. 4: 15-16)

These prophetic words of St Paul take on added significance for us, the followers of Jesus within the Diocese of Down and Connor, as we continue our synodal journey of discernment to identify and meet the ever changing sacramental and pastoral needs of parishioners and society in our time.

In the weeks that follow, the **Pathways to the Future** initiative, which seeks to examine the mission, structures and priorities of the Diocese of Down and Connor for the years ahead, will come into new focus with the organisation of a series of parochial information and consultation sessions across the diocese and I would encourage you all to take this opportunity to share your personal hopes and dreams for the local Church.

Confronting this new reality will necessarily involve words to disturb the comfortable as we explore the restructuring of parishes, the development of new ministries and consider new ways to meet the increasing pastoral and sacramental needs. Change will be inevitable.

At the same time, it is also important to speak words that will bring comfort to the disturbed. The Church will continue to support the faith development of all and provide for the needs of parishioners in the abiding Truth that God is with his people.

This is an exciting time to be Church in Down and Connor and in the world. The world faces many challenges – poverty, climatic change and the threat of war. Now, as in Jesus' time, many people are harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36).

In the weeks and months ahead, I encourage you all to engage in the Christian dialogue and conversations that will be organised by the **Pathways to the Future** as we seek together to listen to one another, to embrace the truth in love and to discern new ways to be ministers of mercy in our day. I also encourage you to pay attention to the Signs of our Times and the concerns of our world so that we can truly be missionary voices of hope to all.

The Church needs to hear your voice. The Church needs each person to speak the truth in love. We need to embrace the challenges and we need voices of hope. Share your dreams and aspirations, your cares and concerns. Let us embark on our diocesan **Pathways to the Future** with realism, joy and hope and may God bless us all on our journey together.



Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Down and Connor