

DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON



PASTORAL LETTER FOR ADVENT 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Stay awake, praying at all times to stand with confidence before the Son of Man” Those words of Jesus at the end of today’s Gospel give meaning to these short weeks of Advent. Many of us will have our heads down with preparations for Christmas. Jesus is urging us to look up, to see how much he welcomes us and loves us. If we open our hearts to his welcome and his love, not only will we be ready when he comes again in glory, we can reach out in welcome and love to our families and to everyone around us.

Prayer, our openness to Jesus, and vocation, that call to welcome and love, have been the themes of our Diocesan Year which ends this coming Saturday, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. I want to thank you for the initiatives in different Parishes and Pastoral Areas during the past year. I invite you to the Closing Mass of this Diocesan Year. It is on this coming Saturday in the Cathedral in Northampton at 11.30 am. The Principal Celebrant will be the Papal Nuncio, His Excellency Archbishop Edward Adams.

That Mass will be an opportunity to thank God for the graces of the past year, and to commit ourselves anew to prayer and to responding to God’s call to each one of us. We will be storing away the Diocesan Year of Prayer and Vocation banners and prayer cards, but we must not stop praying or welcoming and loving in our parishes, in our schools, and in our homes!

When the Bishops met with Pope Francis last September, we asked him what we bishops should be doing. He answered us with a question – how many hours a day do you pray? And in October at the Synod of Bishops with and for young people, Pope Francis encouraged young people to have moments of silent reflection in the midst of the noise of social media.

Together, young and old, in prayer and in the lives we lead, we need to reflect a passionate faith and a passionate authenticity. We need to be real, real that Jesus is with us, that Jesus is among us, that Jesus is our shepherd, our comfort, our friend and our brother!

Already much goes on in the life of our parishes and beyond - welcoming new Catholics, preparing people for the sacraments, members involved in so many roles in the parish, people serving those in need and the work of so many Catholic organisations.

To equip us to make our faith more passionate, to make our faith intellectually and practically reliable, during the new year we are going to provide opportunities for us to better understand our faith, and for some of us to train as lay leaders in our parish communities.

This initiative flows from our *Walking Humbly with our God* and the *Diocesan Year of Prayer and Vocation*. It is an initiative that must be underpinned by the prayers of us all, and by our openness to Jesus.

Times are challenging for the Church and for each of us who are members of the Church. I think that we are being stripped of our own resources so that we rely on Jesus alone. So, as Advent begins, let us look up to Jesus, and let us make Pope Francis' message to the Bishops of England and Wales our own. He said: "Whatever challenges you face, be joyful and be at peace. Why? Because we have a merciful Father waiting for us, the Spirit within us, and Jesus beside us.

So, peace and joy to you this Advent!

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized cross-like symbol followed by the word "Peter".

Bishop of Northampton