



Pastoral Letter to be read at all Sunday masses  
in the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle  
on the weekend of 28/29 January 2023

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ

I am sure that you must be shaken by reports last weekend in the newspapers and the media regarding Newcastle cathedral and the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. It has been a very challenging and difficult week for the Church in this Diocese. It has brought shock and bewilderment to many, and perhaps anger to many more than we even realise. It is to these emotions that I want to address this first part of this letter.

Jesus's teaching in today's gospel has become known as the Beatitudes because each point he makes begins with the word 'blessed or happy'. Blessedness is a state of eternal happiness with God our father. Like signposts, the beatitudes point to the ways in which we welcome God into our lives. They also point to the paths we walk as we live out God's blessing in our lives, parishes, and the world. In these unsettling times for our Diocese, when the shadows of distress and doubt loom large, Jesus sheds the light of his blessing to show us the way; to give us courage and trust in him.

This is an important moment for those of us called to lead the Church, in how we carry out acts of duty and service that we have been called by the Lord to do and most importantly at this time, and how we will sustain your trust and confidence.

I want to be clear that I do not underestimate the difficulties that we are in. But equally I do not doubt God's good grace, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of those who will act in good faith and will seek unstintingly to do the right thing. The various investigations that are now underway which include an in-depth investigation into the events leading up to Bishop Robert's resignation for the Holy See and a full review of safeguarding in the diocese conducted by the Catholic Safeguarding

Standards Agency (CSSA) will establish the facts, and what I who now lead the diocese need to do to make it safe, proactively protecting the vulnerable in doing so. In addition, I am also in close contact with our civil regulators, the Charity Commission, who will ensure that the diocese is acting in accord with its trust deed both in word and spirit.

Those most hurt, and doubly wounded this week through the stories that are circulating in the media, are the survivors and victims of abuse that has happened in our Church. They have truly suffered and continue to do so. We must bear true witness to them and what that abuse has meant in their lives, and in the lives of their family and friends. I would ask you to pray for them and think about their suffering through this period of investigation, as I determine what has actually happened, what should have happened and the resulting consequences.

Christ's message is to 'heal and not hurt', and my message to those victims and survivors is that we will witness your deep and enduring suffering, learn as leaders and as a church, and support you in your own healing.

The second group I wish to address, in terms of the sorrow and pain that the recent media coverage and content has triggered, is you: the holy, faithful, people of God. You who live your faith in what you do from day to day – in your own lives, and what you bring to the lives of your families and communities. You are bearing witness to a Church not just challenged by the allegations that have been made, but one that is coming out of the pandemic period and one which needs to embrace change, to sustain our Church for the future. I thank you all for the constancy of your support, and your honesty in feeding back to us in the coming months – telling us your concerns, your feelings and your thinking on how we can walk better together – the Synodal Way – to improve the life and health of our Church. I know that there are a series of listening exercises being planned to be carried out, that will run alongside the period in which we receive external scrutiny. The details for that will be shared in the next few weeks.

Our Church was born out of suffering, delivering a message of hope for doing better in this life to be more able to enjoy the rewards of the next life. The Beatitudes help in that task and help us face our future together. They ask us to shape our lives and parish communities in the service of Jesus; to renew in ourselves what it means to follow him; and to hand over our pain and distress to Him, while also giving witness to the pain and suffering of others.

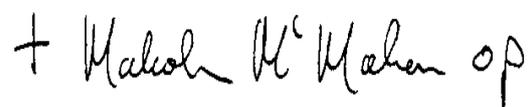
Those who look at our Church from the outside can also help us in this difficult duty, they can point out our failings and show us how to make

matters right. I would ask that we pray for them. It may sound odd or even jarring at this time when we feel we need to heal the present hurt, but the Gospel message reminds us we are also to hunger for righteousness. In this, there will be growth and through adversity the gift of the grace to weather the storm.

Finally, I offer a word to my fellow priests in this Diocese. I will be meeting you all soon and look forward to listening to you and hearing from you. I know that you the priests of the diocese are suffering along with your people. But I urge you to stand up for what is right even if that may bring painful consequences. Over the next few months, we will all bear pain and shame in striving to uncover the truth. But if we keep Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life in our hearts, then we will arrive at a point where, as it says in the gospel today, we can 'Rejoice and be glad'

You may not feel like rejoicing at this time. But the cry of the Gospel message is that in darkness you can be the light. In emptiness you can be filled. In your dissatisfaction and confusion, you are stirred to seek God. It is my privilege to accompany you on this journey.

I assure you of my prayers for the diocese but also for you, your families, and friends.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Malcolm McMahon OP". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev Malcolm McMahon OP  
Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and  
Archbishop of Liverpool

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