

# Diocese of Hallam

## Pastoral Letter

**To be read at all Masses on the weekend of 24/25 November**  
**Feast of Christ the King and National Youth Sunday**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

Happy feast day! Each year, today's feast of Christ the King marks the end of the Church's liturgical year and heralds the season of Advent. For many years now, today is also celebrated as National Youth Sunday.

As some of you may know, I spent the month of October in Rome along with cardinals, bishops, priests, religious men and women and youth from around the world for a synod/meeting on the theme: Youth, Faith and the Discernment of Vocation. The meeting or synod was two years in the preparation, gathering the voices of young people from around the world during that time including some young voices from the Hallam Diocese. Finally, a pre-synod youth meeting took place earlier this year and the production of a document that was our "steer" during the course of the meeting. I felt enormously privileged - if not exhausted at times! - to be part of the synod experience.

In particular, there were two highlights for me. Firstly, the presence of the Holy Father throughout the time of the synod. He was there to welcome us to the St Paul VI centre for each of the plenary sessions of the synod. During the many presentations he listened attentively to what was said. His own words throughout were few but wise. In all this, and more, he showed himself to be a true pastor.

The second highlight for me was to hear the stories from the particular Churches around the world and, especially, some truly inspirational stories of the personal love for Christ and commitment to the life of the church of some of the young in the different Churches. . There were many such stories of the young witnessing to Christ and the giving of their lives: Sister Lita Castillo, a Dominican Sister of the Annunciation, aged 22, who died cruelly at the hands of intruders, Anwar Samaan aged 21 and his younger brother, Misho 17, both Salesian animators with a passion for the Salesian charism, who died in Syria, in 2015, after missiles hit their house and killed them and their mother. Or, Safia Al Abbia, a 24 year old Iraqi Coptic Christian present at the synod who told us that one Sunday leaving Mass he said goodbye to

his friends and that he would see them the following week. He never did. They were killed by a car bomb planted outside the church.

As our journey together unfolded it slowly became clear to us that a model for understanding the Church's mission towards our youth is the story of Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. You will recall that Jesus walks with the two disciples who had not understood the meaning of his story and are moving away from Jerusalem and the community. Jesus appears to them and seems happy to walk in their company even though they are walking away from their community. He asks them questions and listens to their version of recent events to help them *recognise* what they are experiencing. Then, with love, He announces the Word to them leading them to *interpret* in the light of the Scriptures the things that have happened to them in recent days. He takes up their invitation to stay with them. In listening to Him their hearts burn with love, their minds are opened and they recognise Him in the breaking of bread. The disciples then *choose* themselves to continue their journey back to the community in Jerusalem and share their experience of their encounter with the risen Christ.

Our journey over the three and half weeks of the Synod reflected the journey of Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. *"Jesus himself came up and walked by their side"*. (LK 24:15). The first part of our journey was to *recognise* and note the context in which young people around the world live out their lives, how they live their call to a life of faith and to be aware of their strengths and challenges. *"And their eyes were opened."* (LK 24:31). The second part of our journey was to *interpret* the information received from the Churches and come to some understanding of it in the light of the scriptures. *"They set out at that instant and returned to Jerusalem"*. (LK 24:33). On the final part of our journey, we gathered some of the *choices* to be made and the actions to be taken on return to our own particular Church to help us fulfil our mission to the young: that they will know themselves to be loved, valued and listened to.

Here in the Diocese of Hallam we have, in a way, anticipated what the synod is asking of us. Earlier in the year, the Trustees commissioned a review of the provision of Youth Ministry for 11-18 year olds in the Diocese to help us plan for the future. I await the findings due soon. Also, it is hoped that the builders will begin work on the new MissionHub early next month.

With these two new projects, we are putting out into the deep in our commitment to the Youth and Young Adults of the Diocese. We pray that they will bring in a great haul for the Lord!

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