



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

*To be read in all Schools in the week leading up to 6th March 2019,
Ash Wednesday*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Season of Lent begins in just a few days and calls us to think about our Faith and to make promises about how we might put our Faith into action in more practical ways.

This might involve thinking about the ways in which we pray, the importance of raising money for charity or how we might follow the tradition of giving something up for Lent.

I would ask that this year we look beyond personal lives, to our role within our wider communities and to the voice of the Church in our world.

In preparation for Lent this year I am writing to you about a very urgent matter. Most of us will be aware of this issue but may not yet have recognised the need to make a practical response. I speak about Climate Change and our care for the environment of our planet.

In the United Kingdom we have been lucky that the effects of climate change have only had a small impact, but even here we have experienced freak weather conditions which are clear evidence of changes to our climate. We have had floods which have destroyed homes and livelihoods, and other changes to the weather including the so-called Beast from the East which brought blizzards, strong winds and bitter cold last year.

Elsewhere in the world severe and long term droughts, floods, rising sea-levels and extreme temperatures are clear evidence of the damage that our actions and our way of life are having on our world. These have affected millions of people, most often in the poorest countries and who have done least to damage our environment.

This is not a problem that we can just leave to governments to solve. Pope Francis tells us that we are all required, every one of us, to make changes to our lives and begin to repair the damage before matters become irreversible and cannot be fixed. I am sure that a growing number of people are aware of these problems but all too many of us are not taking the actions which are needed to make the difference.

You might well ask why the Bishop is speaking to us about Climate Change. I am writing because Pope Francis is calling us to be aware of what we have done to our world and the certainty that, without immediate action, we will inflict permanent damage on our planet which will affect the lives of our children and our children's children.

This is a matter which is rooted in our Faith. Creation is God's gift to us and we are called to look after God's creation. But for a long time we have exploited our world and its resources, often ignoring the consequences with little thought for the impact of our actions. But now we are coming to understand what we have done and we still have time to correct the damage, if we act quickly.

Every one of us can make a difference by the small actions that we can make.

To name a few:

We can shop more carefully, and only buy the things that we need.

We can walk or cycle more, using public transport more regularly rather than getting lifts in cars.

We can turn lights off in unused rooms and turn the heating down to reduce the energy we use.

We can reduce the waste we make and recycle more.

If everybody makes these minor changes they would combine to have a significant impact on the environment. In this way we can show the goodness of our faith by our actions.

We can also spread the word among family and friends so that everyone understands their role and their responsibilities. I would like to challenge every school and parish in this Diocese to form an action group to come up with a practical response. I invite you to watch "Global Healing" as an introduction to practical ways of helping to heal our planet. I challenge this Diocese to take the lead in Pope's Francis' call to healing our planet. Let's make the Diocese of Salford a leading light for ways to heal and care for our common home.

I would like to think that, as the Bishop of the Diocese, I can always encourage hope. I believe that, thanks to the advances in science, we have discovered the reasons for Climate Change and we still have time to correct our ways. We know that we have caused the extinction of thousands of species. We are changing the seasons by our destruction of the rain forests and we have used up our natural resources for profit. We have caused the melting of the icecaps, the severe droughts, the freak storms, the variations of the seasons upon which agriculture and food production depend. We have caused people in coastal regions to lose their livelihoods through rising sea levels.

But, with our commitment and by working together, we can slow the destruction of the environment and begin to correct our mistakes. There is still time but unless we achieve significant progress in the next 12 years, our scientists are certain that our future generations will suffer life-changing consequences with no means of turning the clock back.

And in our determination and our work, let us remember that we are not walking alone. The gift of the Spirit ensures that we have the strength to do what is right. There is no doubt that we face a human catastrophe but by our willpower we can heal the damage, mend our planet and "care for our common home" for future generations.

"Stay with us, Lord, on our journey"

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+John". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

+John Arnold

Bishop of Salford