



Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney

Bishop of Nottingham

Pastoral Letter **on the Launch of the Diocesan Mission Plan, 2026-2030**

*appointed to be read at all Sunday Masses celebrated in the Diocese of Nottingham
on the Third Sunday of the Year, Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th January 2026*

From early on in my time as your Bishop I have been asked for a plan, a roadmap, for the diocese; something to help us face the challenges that we, like most other dioceses, must find ways to respond to: a steady decline, numerically and financially, in many of our parishes, and fewer and older priests to provide pastoral care across our geographically large diocese. In my visits throughout the diocese, I have listened carefully to laity, clergy and religious. The fruit of that careful listening led to the clarity that our aim must never be just to manage decline, but rather to reshape our diocesan structures for renewal, growth and mission. Over the years I have encouraged a growing recognition that God is calling us to make the three spiritual themes that have characterised the Church throughout the ages the foundation for all we seek to do in our diocese: Encounter, Discipleship and Mission, inspired and enabled by the Holy Spirit and nourished by the Eucharist. But how were we to do this?

In the 2022 and 2024 Lenten Roadshows across the diocese, which involved clergy and a small group of parishioners from each of the parishes, there was a growing recognition that we couldn't continue as we were. Difficult decisions needed to be made to reorganise our parishes into larger amalgamated parishes, and to find ways to be more outward-looking, more engaged with the local wider community. This work has been steadily going on, and the aim is that by Pentecost 2026, or soon after, our total of 108 parishes will have gradually been reduced to the target of 54 parishes, which will include 11 non-amalgamated parishes often in the more rural areas. There was also a more hesitant recognition that a deeper crisis has been our failure as a Church community, over many generations, to respond to Our Lord's commission to his apostles, "Go, make disciples". We recognised a clear call, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to become more confident about our mission to share with others the wonderful difference that knowing Jesus as Our Lord and Saviour makes to our lives.

What began to emerge was a vision of what our diocese might look like if we actively sought ways to respond to Christ's commission, "Go, make disciples", if we continually strove to become more prayerful, outward-looking and missionary. A sense of how to go about this also started to become clearer as I listened carefully to people's accounts of good initiatives in our parishes, schools, Youth Service and Central Support Services (Curia) over the last few years and the different ways in which the Lord was already making these fruitful.

I shared with people this emerging vision and framework in November 2024 in "The Story So Far" document. This was discussed with people across the diocese in the county Roadshows (February 2025). Together, as clergy and laity, we reflected honestly on where we were as a diocese and how best to respond. What emerged was not only a clearer picture of the challenges we face, but also a renewed sense of hope, purpose and shared responsibility. The feedback was rich, honest and constructive, and revealed a diocese that is already moving forward. This is very evident in the generous commitment of clergy and laity finding creative ways to work together, particularly when parishes are amalgamated, in the creativity of the Youth Service, the willingness of the Central Support Services (Curia) to adapt so as to be of yet greater service to parishes, and, above all, in the generosity of those who give of their time and giftedness in parishes everywhere to play their part in the mission entrusted to us all.

The fruit of those reflections was a clear vision for where the Lord is calling us in the next 5 years, the priorities which will help us get there and some insights on how practically to approach this. Accompanying this was a profound clarity that renewal needs to be both spiritual and practical and have, at its heart, a deep fidelity to the Lord's commission and a trust in his unfailing help.

This is why I have chosen today, the 'Sunday of the Word of God' - a day instituted by the late Pope Francis and devoted especially to the celebration of Sacred Scripture - to share with you that we have a new Five Year Diocesan Mission Plan. It is entitled, "Go, make disciples" and it is both a spiritual and a practical mission plan to help us all to respond more and more to those challenging words of Christ Jesus to his disciples, and so to each of us: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28: 19-20). In it, I share the vision which has emerged from our work together over the previous years, as well as a practical framework for how we will do this shaped by the insights of how the Lord is already helping us bear fruit.

The implementation of this plan, and the accompanying renewal of our diocese to make us more equipped for mission over the next five years, cannot be seen as just the responsibility of the parish clergy, a few committed parishioners, the Central Support Services (Curia) and the Bishop. It requires the active participation and spiritual commitment of each and every one of us, in our parishes, chaplaincies, schools and Church organisations, supported by the prayers of the housebound and those clergy and religious now retired. Equally, it will find its expression both in, and far beyond, the walls of our church. Everyone, without exception, is needed to play their part in this renewal. Saint John Henry Newman, recently declared a Doctor of the Church for the quality of his teaching, expressed well the very particular call we each have:

"God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission...Somehow I am necessary for His purposes...I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work."

Each of us has a unique role to play in the plan that God has for our diocese. This five-year Mission Plan, "Go make disciples" is an invitation therefore to place our God-given gifts, talents and prayers, in the service of that commission which Christ has given to each of us. It's an invitation to open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit, the one who makes mission possible; to seek His guidance so that we may grow in greater trust and confidence that when we humbly and hesitantly share with other people the positive difference that knowing and serving Christ makes to our lives, God will bless the little we feel we have to offer and will make it ever more fruitful in His service.

The Diocesan Mission Plan is now available on the Diocesan website and, starting on Monday 26th January 2026, I will be presenting it in a series of area Roadshows. Parish copies of the full plan, and of a shorter version, will be made available at the end of each of the Roadshows.

The encouraging reality is that some parishes, schools and other groups are already well underway. Others are keen to get going. Still others, particularly those currently involved in the process of amalgamation, may need to walk at a slower pace. Each parish is asked to share with me, by 15th June 2026, its first few steps for the first year (June 2026 – June 2027) and then to share an annual progress update on the gradual implementation of the Mission Plan. The Plan will be accompanied by a two-year programme of parish visitations beginning in late Eastertide this year.

My invitation to each one of you would be to read the plan, pray for its implementation and actively look for an opportunity to contribute your gifts and talents to bringing it to life in your part of our diocese.

As we all prepare to set out on this five-year journey to "Go, make disciples", let us pray that the Lord will bless and make fruitful our efforts to respond. Let us make our own that humble and trusting prayer of Cardinal Prevost as he came to the realisation that he was about to be elected Pope:

"Here we go, Lord, you're in charge, you lead the way."

With prayers and gratitude for all the good work going on in our diocese,



Bishop of Nottingham