

MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP Once again, I am delighted to commend to parishes and schools these excellent resources on 'Missionary Discipleship', the spiritual theme that I have asked that we particularly focus on during the Church's Season of Eastertide to Pentecost. I'm very grateful to the small team of generous people who have worked hard to produce these. I am delighted that so many people in our parishes and schools are already engaged in mission and play an active part in the wider community within which their parish or school is situated. I pray that the resources offered here will prove helpful in evaluating what's already happening and in stimulating further reflection on how to engage even more people in the mission that Christ Jesus asks of all his disciples: 'Go make disciples of all nations' (Matt. 28:19). I find it interesting that when Catholics in England and Wales were given back their freedom to practise the faith, and when the hierarchy was restored in 1850, people as different as Cardinal Manning and Cardinal Newman were very conscious of their responsibility to encourage and help facilitate the full and active involvement of the laity in the social, cultural, political and scientific life of England and Wales. Manning emphasised the importance of social and political involvement, while Newman stressed the need for the laity to be fully involved in the cultural and scientific aspects of society. But both of them had a vision of the Church's missionary role in society that was broad and not narrow. Although there was much to be done to build up, once again, the infrastructure of the Church in terms of first schools and then church buildings, they saw clearly the broader vocation and mission of the laity. The Second Vatican Council also gave us a renewed vision of the Church at the heart of the world and at the service of the world. It encouraged us all, lay men and women, boys and girls, young people, religious, clergy and bishop, to be actively involved in that missionary work, in and through the every-day circumstances of our lives: "Since the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelisation the fundamental task of the People of God, this sacred Synod invites all to undertake a profound interior renewal so that being vitally conscious of their responsibility for the spread of the Gospel they might play their part". Subsequent Church and Papal documents have continued in that same broad understanding of mission. "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission. Christ whose mission we follow is the supreme witness and the model of all Christian witness" (Pope John Paul II, 'The Mission of the Redeemer', 42). "If the whole Church takes up this missionary impulse, she has to go forth to everyone without exception. But to whom should she go first? When we read the Gospel we find a clear indication: not so much our friends and wealthy neighbours, but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked, "those who cannot repay you" (Lk 14:14). There can be no room for doubt or for explanations which weaken so clear a message. Today and always, "the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel", and the fact that it is freely preached to them is a sign of the kingdom that Jesus came to establish. We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them". (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, 48) That brief and inadequate historical perspective serves to remind me that our missionary vision for our diocese will be too narrow, if we focus our attention only on the role and involvement of the laity within the internal structures of our parishes and schools. The potentially rich and diverse missionary apostolate of all within the parishes and schools of our diocese deserves more encouragement and appropriate support, and it is my intention that we will do all that we can to facilitate and develop even more lay leadership across our diocese. A key aspect of missionary discipleship is always the recognition of the essential role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as disciples of Christ because, as St Paul emphasises, 'No-one can say, Jesus is Lord except in the power of the Holy Spirit' (I Cor. 12: 3). I would like, therefore, to see some preaching/teaching in our parishes and schools, on the role of the Holy Spirit, in preparation for the Solemnity of Pentecost. Faced with our current challenges as a diocese, we can choose either to close our eyes and bury our heads in the

sand, or we can ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes more widely and to equip us with the grace and courage we need to follow Christ wherever he may be leading us. There can surely be only one viable response: 'Lord, through the guidance of your Holy Spirit, help us to know your will, and then give us all that we need to follow you as your missionary disciples'. May Eastertide 2019 be a most fruitful time of missionary discipleship coming out of our parishes and schools. Bishop Patrick