

**A PASTORAL LETTER
FROM THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER
For the First Sunday of Advent 2024**



APPOINTED TO BE READ AT ALL PUBLIC MASSES IN ALL CHURCHES AND CHAPELS IN THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER ON THE WEEKEND OF 1st December 2024

My dear people,

The centenary of our Diocese has been reached. I invite you to join me in giving thanks to Almighty God for all the faithfulness and generous service of so many in the Diocese over these past one hundred years. Many of you are 'home-grown', but we share our joy with vast numbers of people who have come to live within the Diocese from elsewhere.

Advent is always a new beginning for us, no matter how old we are or how long since our Baptism. We focus anew on Jesus' birth so many years ago, but also on His promise to return and take us – please God - with Him that we might share forever the fulness of life with God.

A number of matters need to be mentioned this year, regarding what is happening in the Church and in the world.

We have a year of Jubilee beginning, called by our Holy Father, Pope Francis. He has given it the title of 'Pilgrims of Hope'. We have a new translation of Sacred Scripture in use in our Lectionaries. We have the year of celebrating the Diocesan Centenary.

By the time this Letter is read, we will have a result on the voting for the Government Bill on Assisted Dying. We have the constant reminder in the media of all that needs attention and fixing if we are to live our lives in peace.

Our life in the Diocese touches all these things and is touched by all of them, and probably by so much more at so many levels.

Personally, I am not blessed with a great intellect and sadly lack many skills that would make me a more capable leader. But what I do believe I have been granted is a deep and personal belief in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This helps me to see the value for us in marking the Diocesan Centenary. I believe it gives us a personal focus that will help us become and remain people of Hope as we begin this new Liturgical Season, this new Liturgical Year. It can become a moment of deeper discovery of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour in our parishes, our schools and our homes.

In 2012, Neil MacGregor, Art Historian, published a book entitled 'A History of the World in 100 Objects'. It is a good read! It has made me think of a possible project we might undertake, starting in this Centenary (and Jubilee) year. 'A History of Lancaster Diocese in 100 Objects'. This is the first time I have shared the idea with anyone! What a fascinating collection we might put together. How it would happen and how long it would take and what it would include, I have no clear idea at this time. One object we must include would be the Papal Bull currently on display in the Cathedral. Have you seen a Papal Bull? It is the announcement from Pope Pius XI by which he established our Diocese in November 1924. We could go on to compose:

'A history of our Diocese in 100 places'

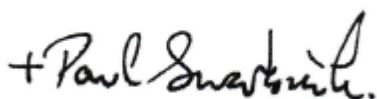
'A history of our Diocese in 100 people'

These are simply ideas at this moment. If they could 'take flesh' I believe they could help us know what the Diocese is, what it is for and why it has a future that is relevant for every circumstance we face in the days and years to come. I hope it would also help others understand who we are as the Catholic community here in the northwest of England. Is it worth doing?

I certainly believe it is worth considering.

This Letter has been far too long! Let me conclude by asking you all to be close to Mary as we prepare for Christmas. May she bring you closer to Jesus, that our hearts may be lifted as we realise the love God has for His children.

With my blessing on you on your families,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Paul Swarbrick." The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster