



Archdiocese of Southwark

Pastoral Letter on *Called to Bear Fruit*

To be read at all Sunday Masses on Saturday 18 / Sunday 19 January 2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

This Jubilee Year calls us to remember that we journey together as ‘Pilgrims of Hope’ who look to Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. At the wedding in Cana, Our Lady spoke words that are addressed to us today: ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ (Jn 2:5) Trusting in the Good News brought to us by the Lord Jesus we are encouraged to look to the future with confidence. God keeps his promises and can make all things new. Therefore, we place our hope in God’s Word. He asks us to be ‘tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.’ This means we each have a part to play in building up the Church’s life of faith and fulfilling the Great Commission to ‘make disciples of all nations.’ (Mt 28:19)

The Jubilee Year offers each of us, and all of us, a profound opportunity to reflect prayerfully on the future of our Archdiocese. We face some significant challenges - nearly half of our diocesan priests will reach the canonical retirement age of 75 by the end of 2025; Mass attendance has declined by a third over the past 25 years; and many parishioners have yet to return to parish life since the pandemic. But - and importantly - these realities do not need to define us. Financial uncertainties in many of our parishes may feel daunting, but they are also an invitation to rediscover our mission, and to dream boldly about what God can achieve through us.

Pope Francis, in his letter *The Joy of the Gospel*, shared a vision that resonates deeply with the challenges we face: “I dream,” he said “of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language, and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 27).

I have the privilege to serve as your Archbishop, and I want to say to you that I share this dream. A dream of an Archdiocese where every parish embraces this missionary spirit, becoming evermore vibrant communities where new people are continually encountering the Lord Jesus. My hope is for our parishes to be places of profound

joy and healing, where lay men and women experience the transformative love of Christ; where they are equipped to carry forward the Church's mission with renewed purpose. I invite you to dream with me and to make this dream a reality.

In 2023, we embarked on a process entitled *Called to Bear Fruit*. It's a journey of listening, collaboration, and renewal in a spirit of synodality. We began by listening to the hopes and concerns of our clergy. Now, I would like also to hear from you, my sisters and brothers in Christ. What signs of vitality do you see flourishing in your parish? Where do you perceive the challenges to be? How can we work together, as clergy, laity and consecrated people, and neighbouring parishes, to make the Church's mission more effective in our local communities?

Today, I would like to ask for your help in two ways:

First of all, please pray for the renewal of our Archdiocese. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to illumine our hearts and minds with fresh possibilities during this Jubilee Year of Hope. Together, let us pray for the courage and wisdom to discern the path ahead.

Secondly, to engage in the *Called to Bear Fruit* consultation. A booklet is available at Mass today which outlines six key themes for reflection. I encourage you to gather in small groups, as works best in your community. Come together prayerfully to reflect on these themes, and share your insights with the *Called to Bear Fruit* team. The booklet explains everything about how to do this.

When I began my ministry as your Archbishop, I said that I did not come to the Archdiocese to manage decline, but to lead with hope. This Jubilee Year of Hope is our chance to open ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to work together towards a revival of Christian life, witness, and mission in our Archdiocese. For this, I humbly ask for your prayers, your ideas, and your active participation. Together, we can re-imagine our parishes as thriving centres of faith, healing, and evangelisation.

As Pilgrims of Hope, therefore, let us walk this journey together with faith, courage, and joy.

With every blessing and with the assurance of my prayers and gratitude

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ John Wilson

Metropolitan Archbishop of Southwark