



**Pastoral Letter Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time
11 February 2024
Journeying Towards A Jubilee Year**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Season of Lent. Lent is an invitation for us all to reflect upon the great mysteries of faith we commemorate, particularly during Holy Week.

Next year is a Jubilee year, with the theme, *Pilgrims of Hope*. But what is this Jubilee about? This is how Pope Francis explains things:

‘We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision. The forthcoming Jubilee can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire; that is why I have chosen as the motto of the Jubilee, *Pilgrims of Hope*.’

As I make my pilgrim way around the parishes of the Diocese, the life and witness of our parish communities are very encouraging. When we consider the decisions which must be made, we may recognise the trust and vision which these demand of us. This encourages us all to pray together for the gift of hope.

There is a particular context for our journey through Lent this year. As we look forward to the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis asks us to make 2024 a time of prayerful preparation, with a focus on the prayer that Jesus taught us, the *Our Father*. Prayer is a central element of a Jubilee year. Prayer, personal and communal, is essential if we are to discern the Lord’s will for us as a Diocese moving forwards. There is an opportunity for us to reflect on the Lord’s Prayer during the coming months, either individually or in groups, as we use a national resource that has been published by the Bishops’ Conference. It is called *We Dare To Say*. Your priest will have copies of this and will no doubt encourage you to use this resource as a wonderful means of grace during this year.

From ancient times, Christians have made pilgrimages to holy places. They have sought to encounter the face of Christ, to deepen their faith and to touch the merciful reconciliation which Jesus offers each of us as pilgrims. Many of us may remember the opportunity to pass through a *Holy Door*. This may have been in Rome. In recent times, dioceses have been able to make a holy door accessible more locally. And so pilgrimage is an important part of a Jubilee Year. Holy doors remind us of Jesus’ words in the Gospel, ‘*I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*’ Pilgrimage then, is a powerful expression of our decision to follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd and to be guided by Him.

Over the next two years, we have a number of diocesan pilgrimages available to us. These include our customary pilgrimages to Walsingham and Lourdes. In these places, we seek the maternal intercession of Our Lady. In October 2024, there will be a pilgrimage to Northern France, visiting Lisieux, Chartres and Paris. During the Jubilee Year in 2025, our Diocese, along with many others from around the world, will make a pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi. Whilst in Rome there is an opportunity to walk through the Holy Door at St Peter’s Basilica. I look forward to being with you

in these pilgrimages. Closer to home, there is a walking pilgrimage from the Cathedral in Northampton to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Bedford. In September this year, there is a National Eucharistic Congress at Oscott College. You may wish to organise parish pilgrimages to other holy places. I am very aware that many are unable to afford an overseas pilgrimage these days. But hopefully there will be an opportunity for each of us to participate in a pilgrimage journey.

We experience a Jubilee Year every twenty-five years in our Church. The last one was the millennium year of 2000. Occasionally, popes declare an extraordinary year of Jubilee, just as Pope Francis did when he proclaimed the *Year of Mercy* in 2015. The Jubilee Year of 2025 is already familiar to us. We chose its theme, *Pilgrims of Hope*, as the title of our diocesan Assembly last July. We continue to pray together. We hold spiritual conversations across the Diocese. We seek to discern the way forward in regard to the decisions we need to make. In all of this, we are involved in a holy pilgrimage. It is my sincere hope and prayer, each one of us will journey towards the forthcoming Holy Year with a sense of expectation. It is also my hope and prayer that the Jubilee Year, *Pilgrims of Hope*, will enable us to strengthen our witness of prayer across the Diocese and our endeavour to become truly and intentionally, missionary communities. To this end, I am spending an evening in a number of parishes across the Diocese. These evenings, rooted in prayer and dialogue, are opportunities to unpack and discuss the theme of *Pilgrims of Hope*. It would give me much joy to meet with you there.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+David Oakley

Bishop of Northampton

Given at Northampton on 25th January 2024, The Feast of the Conversion of St Paul
and appointed to be read or distributed in all churches and chapels of the Diocese
on the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, 10th and 11th February, 2024