

A Pastoral Letter

In Thanksgiving for the Diocesan-wide Initiative 'Our Mission Together'

To be read at Mass in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on
Sunday 24th June 2018
the Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist

My dear brothers and sisters,

The Gospel today tells how people throughout the hill country of Judea treasured the news of the birth of John the Baptist and wondered, "*What will this child turn out to be?*" (Lk 1:66). Like them we might wonder about the future, for it is not given us to see precisely how the mission of the Church will develop in the decades to come. I think of the first Bishop of Shrewsbury who could see few human prospects for this fledgling Diocese. Yet he was able to look forward in the same faith and confidence with which the mission of John the Baptist began, that the hand of the Lord would be with us (cf Lk 1:66).

Today, I write to give thanks for the Diocesan-wide initiative *Our Mission Together* which has shown our shared commitment to the future mission of our Shrewsbury Diocese. A series of priorities have found strong resonance among clergy and lay people. Together we have committed ourselves to support: new vocations to the Priesthood and the unprecedented number of priests moving into retirement; the development of our youth mission and our social mission to the poorest; the renewal of catechesis in our parishes; and the vocation of Christian Marriage. Added to all this, we have seen a large number of local, parish initiatives making possible what might have seemed impossible.

This Sunday, we can say *Our Mission Together* has proved to be a historic achievement for this Shrewsbury Diocese. It has been a bold initiative that has occasioned renewed prayer for mission and generous, sacrificial giving of millions of pounds in material support of these priorities. Most happily, as I was told the other day, it has turned the thoughts and conversations of many towards our continuing mission.

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I wish to thank all who have shared in this achievement: by your dedicated prayer; in giving of your time and energies (especially the more than 220 volunteers!); by the generous pledging of monies; or by simply taking time to consider this opportunity. I wish to thank the clergy who have worked with dedication for this initiative and have been generous donors themselves. I wish to acknowledge the professionalism of those working for our Diocese, and the charitable fundraisers who have supported us, together with the laity and clergy who served on the Campaign Advisory Committee. I have been heartened by meetings which have focused upon our mission and our future.

I ask your prayer for the Stewardship Committee, comprising both lay people and clergy, now tasked with ensuring that all funds effectively serve the goals for which they were given. I also ask your prayers for the increasing number of young men coming forward in both discernment and training for the Priesthood and the men preparing for the Permanent Diaconate. I ask your continued prayer: for the *Youth Mission Team* in its increasing work across the large geographical area of the Diocese, with the development of many new projects for young people; for *Caritas Diocese of Shrewsbury* as the arm of our social mission in the service of the poorest; and for our dedicated welfare officer already helping to serve the needs of our retired clergy. The next two areas of development are the support and formation of parish catechists and support of the vocation of marriage. I ask your prayers for all these intentions. I ask you to remember, too, the wide range of local mission projects and new initiatives now taking shape in the parishes.

So much has happened - and will continue to happen - in what is truly our mission together. It is not given us to see precisely how all of its effects and fruitfulness will be realised. Yet, in seeking to be faithful today to our mission, we have the same assurance that marked the birth of Saint John Baptist: that the hand of the Lord will be with us! In this confidence let us ask Our Lady, the Help of Christians, together with all the Saints of our Shrewsbury Diocese, to pray for us.

United with you in this prayer and in this mission,

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury