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THE HOLY FAMILY 2024
PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE OPENING OF THE JUBILEE YEAR

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I offer my greetings as we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph within the Octave of Christmas. In joyful obedience to the Holy Father, I will today celebrate Mass in our Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Norwich to mark the commencement of diocesan participation in the Jubilee Year of 2025. Every diocesan bishop across the Universal Church will be celebrating within their own Cathedral. Pope Francis quotes St Paul's Letter to the Romans at the beginning of the Bull of Indiction for this Holy Year: *SPES NON CONFUNDIT / HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT* (Rom.5:5).

The Holy Father calls us to be 'Pilgrims of Hope' in the midst of the world; calls us to a fresh and genuine encounter with the Lord Jesus, who is the 'door' of our salvation (Jn.10:7.9). The recent Synod on Synodality concluded with a renewed call to effective and fruitful mission, a call to proclaim, always and everywhere, that Jesus Christ is our hope. The hope we speak of is no mere optimism, it is the serene gift that confronts and conquers all pessimism and cynicism. The hope we speak of fosters that patience which addresses the frenetic haste of a world that has lost its way.

Pastoral Letter for The Opening of the Jubilee Year

The first Holy Year was promulgated by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300 AD and the last Ordinary Jubilee was celebrated to mark the completion of the Second Christian Millennium. You will recall that Pope Francis inaugurated an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2015. Every Jubilee Year is a call to conversion and offers many graceful opportunities. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation constitutes an essential foundation and focus for every 'Pilgrim of Hope'. The Jubilee Year of 2025 will also mark the 1700th anniversary of the very first Ecumenical Council, convened in 325 AD at Nicaea, in present day Turkey. The Council of Nicaea gloriously defended and vigorously proclaimed the doctrine that Jesus Christ was fully divine, consubstantial with the Father. We are called to proclaim the fullness of our faith in every age, in every circumstance.

Pope Francis is also calling us to discover hope in the signs of the times that are provided by the Lord himself. Our diocese is currently engaging with the principles outlined by the Synod on Synodality, for the synodal journey is not concluded but entrusted to the creativity of the local Churches (dioceses). We are charged with discerning the signs of the times as they impact upon our local and regional mission. This undertaking will constitute a great and challenging work over the coming two years. Whilst 2025 marks a worldwide Jubilee, 2026 will mark a particular Jubilee for East Anglia for we will then be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of our diocese. During the coming months we will reflect upon the first phase of our pastoral consultation and begin a second phase which will involve a much more concrete engagement with the realities that have been highlighted. It is my hope and intention that any emerging proposals for enhancing our mission will be ready for implementation by the autumn of 2026. Every Pilgrim of Hope must become a Missionary Disciple.

Pope Francis opened the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica on Christmas Eve to inaugurate the Jubilee Year. On today's Feast of the Holy Family the Pope opens the Holy Door at his own Cathedral, the Basilica of St, John Lateran, and others will follow

Pastoral Letter for The Opening of the Jubilee Year

at the Basilica of St.Mary Major, the Basilica of St.Paul Outside the Walls, and a fifth Holy Door has been designated at a Roman Prison. Whilst the faithful are encouraged to undertake a pilgrimage to Rome during a Year of Jubilee, the vast majority will be unable to travel. Therefore, each diocese has been empowered to designate its own Cathedral Church as a location for Jubilee pilgrimage, together with one other named site. I have nominated the Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady at Walsingham as the second location for our own diocese. By undertaking a Jubilee pilgrimage the faithful can obtain a plenary indulgence whilst fulfilling the established norms.

In January I will be journeying to Rome on pilgrimage, accompanied by ecumenical leaders from our region, including the Bishop of Norwich. We will encounter the Holy Father and hold meetings with the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. I will again make pilgrimage to Rome in July when I will be leading our diocesan pilgrimage for Young People. Over thirty young adults have already committed themselves to this journey and I call upon others to consider joining our joyful project. A full itinerary of diocesan Jubilee celebrations has been posted on the diocesan website and will be advertised as the year unfolds.

Pope Francis calls us to be anchored in the hope that Jesus sets before us, the hope that enters the inner shrine of the human soul, the hope that enables us to live in Christ and to overcome fear, sin and death. During this Year of Jubilee we are called upon to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable – the sick, the disabled, prisoners and migrants. We are also called upon to treasure the young and the old alike. Psalm 27 calls us to “hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord”. May our faithful witness to Jesus Christ be for the entire world a leaven of authentic hope.

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Across the three year cycle of scripture readings for today's Feast of the Holy Family, we are presented with accounts of the Escape into Egypt, the Presentation of the Infant Jesus and the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple. These Gospel texts speak of pilgrimage, of spiritual dedication and encounter which all prepare the way for future mission. I call upon you to join me in prayer, asking that the coming days of Jubilee pilgrimage will be blessed with an abundance of grace and hope. On this Feast of the Holy Family may we, as a diocesan family, be re-awakened to the mission of becoming cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel, heralds of God's Kingdom.

In the fullness of Christmas peace and joy,

+Peter

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