



Bosco MacDonald
Bishop of Clifton

PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

SUNDAY 28 DECEMBER 2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, the Church invites us to contemplate anew the quiet strength, the steadfast love and the attentive trust that marked the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Their life in Nazareth was simple, hidden and at times anxious, yet it was within that small household that God chose to dwell among us. The Holy Family shows us that God's grace is at work in ordinary life and that holiness often grows best in the soil of patient love.

This year the feast carries a particular significance for our diocese, because it marks the closing of our diocesan celebration of the Jubilee Year of Hope. The universal Jubilee continues until the Epiphany, when the Holy Doors in St Peter's Basilica in Rome will be closed. So today we pause as a diocesan family to give thanks for the graces of this year and to consider how the virtue of hope may continue to shape our life together.

The Scriptures offered to us today portray the Holy Family as a living school of hope. In the First Reading, Sirach speaks of the reverence owed between generations, and in the Second, St Paul urges us to clothe our lives with compassion, gentleness, patience and forgiveness, bound together in love. The Gospel introduces us to a family who know both worry and trust as they watch the child Jesus grow in wisdom and grace. Nazareth was no idealised sanctuary. It was the place where three hearts learned to listen to God in the quiet demands of daily life. St Augustine reminded us that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Much of family life reveals that restlessness, and yet it is precisely there that God works most tenderly.

The Jubilee Year has echoed this divine patience. Since the fourteenth century the Church has kept jubilee years as signs that God desires a new beginning for his people. In calling the world to a Year of Hope, Pope Francis invited us to walk with courage through a year marked by war, inequality, and the lingering wounds of the pandemic. Across dioceses in the UK, and throughout the world, holy doors have been opened, pilgrimages undertaken, catechesis renewed and works of mercy intensified. Resources for schools and parishes have led many to rediscover hope as a daily discipline grounded in prayer, Scripture and service. Pope Francis's gesture of opening a Holy Door within a prison reminded the whole Church that hope belongs even in the most wounded places, and our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, has continued to urge the Church to be a sign of hope especially for the young and the burdened.

Within our own diocese, this Jubilee has borne fruit in many quiet ways. Our schools have helped children reflect on the meaning of hope and undertake local pilgrimages. Our parishes have offered times of adoration, reconciliation

and charitable outreach. Some have strengthened their welcome to those who struggle with loneliness, bereavement or poverty. Others have renewed ministries of listening and prayer. Many individuals, too, have made their own pilgrimages, whether to shrines or simply to their own parish church, seeking a new beginning in faith. These small acts, woven together, form a tapestry of hope far richer than any single event could capture.

As we mark the close of this diocesan Year of Hope, I want to say thank you to every parishioner, priest, deacon, religious and anyone who has helped others draw nearer to Christ. The Jubilee belongs to all who have opened their hearts, even for a moment, to the graces extended to them this year. I encourage every household to reflect prayerfully on the past months. Ask where hope has quietly taken root in your life. Give thanks for the consolations received and for the courage granted in times of trial.

In the Scriptures, Jubilee is a time when debts are forgiven and relationships restored. If there is someone in your life who would welcome a word of peace, forgiveness or reconciliation, this is a blessed time to take such a step. Hope grows wherever hearts are restored to one another.

As we look ahead, let us remember that the end of a Jubilee does not bring an end to its grace. The Christian life is always a pilgrimage. The years before us will steer the Church towards the special Jubilee of 2033, the two thousandth anniversary of our redemption by the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Blessed Lord. These coming years can become a steady path of renewal in our families and parishes. I encourage each person and each community to begin with one simple question: What step can we take to deepen our faith, hope and love in the coming year? Whether through renewed commitment to Sunday Mass, a small daily pattern of prayer, reading of Scripture, or a concrete act of mercy, each small step has value. Faith becomes strong when it is practised and shared.

On this feast day, I entrust our diocesan family once again to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Mary teaches us to trust God's promises even in uncertainty. Joseph reminds us of the dignity of fidelity and quiet strength. The child Jesus, at the heart of their home, sanctifies every stage of human life and every household that welcomes him.

May the Holy Family bless your homes with peace and courage. May they draw our diocese into deeper communion and help us to become a community where every person can experience hope, especially those who feel forgotten or weighed down. The door of God's mercy remains always open and Christ continues to be the hope of our families, our parishes and our world.

With the assurance of my prayers for you and your loved ones, I ask the Lord to bless you abundantly in the New Year ahead.

With my prayers and best wishes



Rt Rev Bosco MacDonald
Bishop of Clifton

To be read and made available at all Churches and Chapels
in the Clifton Diocese on the weekend of 27/28 December 2025