



## Christmas Message 2022

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity, is upon us once again. Celebrating this central feast of Christian faith and life enables us to draw ongoing strength, hope and joy from the mystery of the birth of God in human history.

In the cradle of the manger, the Christ-child drew to himself and experienced the warmth of human love. Love, the love that puts the other first, gives meaning to life. Each of us, created in the image of God, similarly find warmth and meaning in the expression of human love. Self-less acts of charity and reaching out to others with care and attention reveal our own dignity and the nobility of those we love and care for. Self-less acts of human love bring hope and joy to our world. They have the potential to transform lives and human relationships. The Christmas mystery stimulates us to contemplate and make concrete that alternative, radically new and self-less love of God for humanity revealed in the birth of Christ.

The infant child in the manger was vulnerable, surrounded by the relentless threat of conflict and born into conditions of poverty and personal and family insecurity. This Christmas the constant threat of war and conflict stalks our world. Our prayers remain with the people of Ukraine, the Middle East, with those experiencing political insecurity and those threatened with sectarian violence. Economic hardship, unemployment and the rising cost of living, fueled by global and local instability, generate a poverty of circumstance in our own time. On the part of many, they also increase anxiety for the future and for the life possibilities of our young people. Responsible leadership, constructive dialogue and effective stewardship in the service of others are the only sure foundations for the way forward.

The infant-child brought others together in contemplation. The 'Synodal Pathway' in Ireland and across the world, initiated by Pope Francis, is a response in our time, a time of profound change, to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Like Mary and Joseph, the Church, that is all who believe in Christ, are now called to humbly discover new ways to contemplate and embrace the mystery of God. Synodal dialogue, respectfully listening to the faith experiences of others, can assist us all in exploring ways to recognise God's presence in the world and to nurture the seedlings of faith in Christ.

In the historical unfolding of the Nativity, many individuals played a role: Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds and the Magi from the East. This same dynamic is evident in the life of our and each local Church. In a time of challenge and renewal, this Diocese has initiated a collaborative process called 'Pathways to the Future' to help discern in the decades ahead new ways to meet the pastoral and sacramental needs of parishioners. Building upon the inspirational work of volunteers across the diocese, this initiative will entail parishioners playing a more active role in the ministry, leadership, and management of our parishes. This will require our parishes to collaborate, share resources, come together as families and communities in worship and faith. Moving into the New Year, the Pathway Team will embark on a process of synodal listening and engagement within parishes to develop this vision for the future of the diocese and make it a reality.

As I celebrate this Christmas with you in Down and Connor, I prepare to take leave from the diocese that I have served for the last 14 years. I appreciate deeply and cherish the welcome and support I have received from you all over that time and I will certainly be sad to leave. I have so many fond memories and have been inspired by your faithful witness. I pray God's blessing upon you and your families and I assure you of my continued prayers this Christmas and in the years ahead.

May the blessings of the Christmas Season bring hope and joy into your hearts and homes and assure you of God's love in the New Year 2023.

Apostolic Administrator of Down and Connor