

# Part 1: Setting the Vision

## Bishop's Letter



18<sup>th</sup> April 2023

The Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick  
Bishop of Lancaster  
The Bishop's Office,  
The Pastoral Centre,  
Balmoral Road,  
Lancaster LA1 3BT  
☎ (01524) 596050

### To the Priests and Religious of the Diocese

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The season of Easter is characterised by a significant phrase of Our Lord that we find at the very beginning of the Acts of the Apostles: "You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth". This great missionary commandment, to be witnesses to the love and mercy of God to all generations provides the impulse, the heartbeat of the life of the Church. In our Gospel this weekend, we see that impulse at work in the companions who encounter the Risen Lord in the breaking of the bread. Their hearts burned within them as they rushed back to share their news, to bear witness to the Resurrection with joy.

In response to that commandment, our Church established many schools throughout the diocese to serve the mission of making Christ known and loved. Since the middle of the twentieth century, when our schools were nationalised to meet the post-war needs of our nation, we have had a particular way of working with the state through our network of Voluntary-Aided Schools. Over recent years a new way of working in partnership with the state has been offered to the Catholic Church in England through the creation of state-funded independent schools known as academies. These academies work closely with others under the direction of a Multi-Academy Trust which strives to help schools become the best they can be for our young people and communities.

In 2020 I wrote to schools inviting them to come together to form three Multi-Academy Trusts within the Diocese of Lancaster. At that time, I stated that my aim in doing so was to seek to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education through greater collaboration and support between our school communities and parishes. Many schools and parishes responded positively to this invitation and we are now in a position where the three Multi-Academy Trusts have been formed. These Trusts operate under the authority and oversight of the Diocesan Trustees and the Diocese of Lancaster Education Service and exist in order to serve the mission of the Church in education. I am grateful to the 'founding schools', especially to their staff and Foundation Governors, for their loyalty and courage in responding so positively to my request.

I now request that the remaining Voluntary-Aided schools of the diocese begin a process of conversion to become academies within the Multi-Academy Trusts of our Diocese. This will begin in September and last until the end of the academic year 2025-26. At this point, all the schools of the diocese will be academies. The Diocese of Lancaster Education Service will contact governing bodies outlining when their school is expected to become an academy. I ask that staff and Foundation Governors cooperate fully with this strategy for the good of their school and for the good of the mission of the Church in education.

I repeat what I have previously written: "A Catholic school is not just a building; it is a community, and those who form this community and participate in it cultivate this place of human growth. Over the years, our forefathers fought hard to establish and maintain Catholic Education in these lands. It is our turn to ensure that Catholic Education is maintained and enabled to grow and develop for future generations, particularly through greater collaboration between individual school communities." May this initiative enable us to work more closely together, and together may we respond positively to that invitation of Our Lord to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Yours sincerely in Christ

*+Paul Swarbrick*

Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick  
**Bishop of Lancaster**

Lancaster Roman Catholic Diocesan Trustees Registered - Charity Number 234331

