



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

*Pastoral Letter of
The Right Reverend Terence J Brain
Bishop of Salford*

Dear Family of God in Salford Diocese,

This year coincides with the 10th anniversary of the UN Year of the Family, and the Church in England and Wales is using this year to launch a programme called "**Listening 2004**" and each Bishop has been asked to share this with his diocese.

Every one nowadays has a bye-line or strap-line and there is a strap line that defines Listening 2004. It is "**My family, My Church.**" During the coming months each diocese - through Co-ordinators from our Deaneries - will be bringing **Listening 2004** to your attention. We will be invited to listen to each other sharing our stories. Stories of what marriage is like in this world of ours. Stories of both the tensions and of the joys of marriages, which, because they are personal stories, will ring true to our own experience. Stories of what supports and encouragements can be given through our Church family.

There is enough said and written today which implies that marriage is a very risky venture; but there is so much more unsaid which throws light on the life and vitality that comes from a deep, loving, respecting, forgiving, encouraging marriage. This we need to hear, over and over. **Listening 2004** will help us to hear it.

Our diocese has already gathered co-ordinators within the Deaneries and they will begin their work in the next weeks, preparing people from our parishes to act as Representatives, to draw examples of our strengths and difficulties in preparing people for marriage, sustaining them in marriage and celebrating the events in their married lives. It is hoped that all this will culminate in a great Diocesan Celebration of Marriage on Saturday, October 23rd.

During the first year of Faith in the Future, one of the areas in our consultation that was foremost in people's minds was the family. Our hopes for the future rest, in part, on families and the next generations. Now we have an opportunity, not just to highlight a need but to respond and begin to seek and find Christ in our families again.

This **Listening 2004** initiative will be an incentive to pray for family life, and we committed ourselves in Faith in the Future to being people of Prayer. This initiative is an opportunity to provide ourselves with the resources to prepare people, in our “post everything” civilisation, for the vocation of Christian marriage. And we are committed to being a people who are prepared to proclaim the Gospel. And what better proclamation is there of the Living Word than to look around us and see the image and likeness of our God in our families, our Church.

+ Terence
Bishop of Salford

*Given at Wardley Hall on 20th February,
and appointed to be read in all chapels and churches of the Diocese
on the weekend of 29th February 2004 , the First Sunday of Lent.*