

During my visitations to schools and parishes over the past eighteen months, I have met with clergy, headteachers, and the chairpersons of school governing bodies and academy councils. I have discussed with them two important issues: the preparation of our children and young people for the Sacrament of Confirmation and the provision of youth services. It is these two matters which I now wish to address.

### **The Sacrament of Confirmation**

It is a cause of concern to me that in the Diocese of Leeds a large proportion of those who are baptised into the Catholic Church (68%) and make their first Holy Communion (58%) do not receive also the Sacrament of Confirmation. This means that we are failing, as a diocesan family, to complete the initiation into the Catholic Faith of a considerable number of our children and young people. Such a failure deprives many of our young people of the objective grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation; the spiritual gift which provides the vital help they need in their young and adult lives.

I have decided therefore to change the age at which the Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred from the age of 14 to 11; that is, from school year 9 to year 6, the last year of primary education. This, I believe, will enable us to focus on and provide a more integral preparation and celebration of the sacraments of initiation within the primary years of education. In the secondary years of education, the focus will be on how those who are joined to Christ in His Church live out their faith and give witness to their faith through vocation and service in the world around them.

Further detailed information on how this change will affect the preparation for and celebration of First Sacraments in our parishes and schools, and the timetable for the implementation of the change, has been provided by the Vicariate for Education in Appendix A to this Pastoral Letter.

### **Youth Service Provision**

The future of Youth Service provision in the diocese is linked to this change of focus in secondary education. Looking ahead, youth services will be developed in such a way that there will be a greater collaboration between the Diocesan Youth Service, school clergy and lay chaplains, parish and deanery catechists, and other partners. The aim of this collaboration will be to develop and build a service which fosters within our young people the desire to deepen their knowledge and love of Our Lord Jesus Christ and to serve Him in other people and the world around them.

Above all, it will be important to ensure that the catechesis and religious education we offer our young people provides them with a rich knowledge and understanding of their Catholic faith, the desire to live their faith, and the passion to promote their faith.

It is important that we develop a Youth Service that will help to build the capacity for youth ministry to be formed and sustained at a local level and to increase the opportunities for young people to become engaged in the life and mission of the local Catholic community.