



THE BISHOP OF LEEDS
The Right Reverend Marcus Stock

Bishop's House, 13 North Grange Road, Leeds, LS6 2BR
www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk

His Holiness Pope Leo XIV
Apostolic Palace
Vatican City State
00120 Rome
ITALY

25th August 2026

Most Holy Father,

In the letters I received appointing me as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Middlesbrough and as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Hallam, your Holiness asked me to initiate, among the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Dioceses of Leeds, Middlesbrough and Hallam, a 'phase of study and discussion with a view to their possible future union'.

Over the past eight months, an extensive consultation process has been undertaken across the three dioceses. It has brought together representatives from all of the 193 parishes, including lay women and men, deacons and priests, institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, the leaders of schools and school multi-academy trusts, and a range of Catholic organisations and apostolates.

In the preparation for, and the organisation of, the consultation meetings with the People of God across the three dioceses, I adopted the same methodology as implemented at the Synods which took place in Rome in October 2023 and October 2024. This allowed each participant in the consultation meeting to contribute to the prayerful discussion.

Engagement in the consultation has enlivened a zeal for mission that is evident in the hearts of those who took part. It demonstrates too, the love and appreciation for the rich heritage of the saints and martyrs, and pride in the Catholic patrimony that exists throughout the whole of the historic County of Yorkshire and other areas of the ecclesiastical circumscriptions which these dioceses encompass.

The consultation has enabled us to consider the challenges we face in the future; it has also opened before us opportunities to strengthen our participation in the mission entrusted by Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to His Church, and to renew our vigour in responding to the work of evangelisation. The guiding principle which has underpinned our consultation has been not about how diocesan structures might change, but how those structures can better support the Church's mission today and in the future.

While recognising and valuing the distinct identity and ecclesial patrimony of each local Church, I believe that the unification of the three dioceses would offer significant pastoral advantages. Such a development could strengthen ecclesial communion, promote greater missionary outreach, facilitate a more effective stewardship of human and temporal resources, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of diocesan ministry. It would enable the Church in this region to respond more effectively to the pastoral needs of the People of God and to advance her evangelical mission with renewed confidence and vigour.

The three separate meetings I had with the priests and deacons of each diocese elicited a very encouraging unanimity in favour of the unification of the dioceses, notwithstanding the potential for concern that such a proposal might otherwise have generated. This unanimity was reflected also in the results of the consultation with the Council of Priests in the Diocese of Leeds and the College of Consultors in each of the three dioceses.

The proposal for the unification of the dioceses has also received the unanimous support of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The detailed responses of all the consultation meetings which likewise express an unusual level of support for the unification of the dioceses can be found in the accompanying report.

Should a unified Diocese be established, I propose that the Cathedral Church of Saint Anne, Leeds, become the Cathedral Church and the *cathedra* of the diocesan Bishop. Leeds is central to the geographical area covered by the three dioceses and has excellent road and rail infrastructure to connect it to all of the major conurbations. It is further proposed that the Cathedral Church of Saint Mary, Middlesbrough, and the Cathedral Church of Saint Marie, Sheffield, be recognised as Co-Cathedrals, thereby preserving their ecclesial significance for their respective current communities.

Similarly, I would propose to Your Holiness that a unified Diocese bear the title, 'Diocese of Leeds and York'. This title would recognise the City of Leeds as the location of the Cathedral Church and the seat of the diocesan Bishop. The inclusion of York within the diocesan title would acknowledge the profound ecclesiastical significance of the ancient Catholic See of York, as well as being the City which gave its name to the three ridings which comprised the historic County of Yorkshire (the North and East Riding which encompassed the current territory of the Diocese of Middlesbrough, and the West Riding which incorporated the majority of the current territory of the Dioceses of Leeds and Hallam).

With regard to ecumenical relationships, unification would create a more beneficial strategic forum of dialogue with the three Anglican (Church of England) dioceses whose boundaries would be virtually coterminous with those of a unified Catholic diocese.

Having carefully considered the spiritual, pastoral, canonical, and ecclesiological needs of the Dioceses of Leeds, Middlesbrough, and Hallam, and having listened attentively to the clergy, religious, lay faithful, and the consultative bodies constituted under Canon Law within the ecclesiastical circumscriptions of those three local Churches, I respectfully submit my *votum* and the information in the report accompanying this letter to Your Holiness and to the Dicastery for Bishops.

With the assurance of my prayers for Your Holiness, and with filial devotion, I remain,

Yours in Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



Rt Rev Marcus Stock

Bishop of Leeds

Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Middlesbrough

Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Hallam

Cc: His Excellency Mgr. Filippo Iannone, O. Carm., Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops
His Excellency Mgr. Ilson de Jesus Montanari, Secretary of the Dicastery for Bishops