



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
 appointed to be read in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
 on 24th September 2017, the Twenty-Fifth Sunday of the Year.

BRINGING PEOPLE TO JESUS THROUGH HIS CHURCH

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today, the Twenty-Fifth Sunday of the Year, a Day of Thanksgiving Prayer for the Harvest, is also the Feast of Our Lady of Walsingham and the fifth anniversary of my ordination as your Bishop. Much has happened these past five years, much to thank God for. But as I have become more familiar with our parishes and schools, clergy and people, I have begun through prayer and reflection to form a vision of where I believe God wishes to lead our Diocese over the next decade or so, building on all that has gone before.

So, here are my hopes and aspirations as your Shepherd and Pastor. They revolve around four priorities.

First, mission and evangelisation. In the past decades, as Catholics we have been good at catechising and 'sacramentalising' but much less effective at evangelising and converting. 3.129 million people live within the area of our Diocese, of whom 230,000 are baptised Catholics. Through friendship, word, service and example, Jesus sends us out as His ambassadors. He wants us to connect with all these souls so they can hear the Gospel, meet Him in His Church, find happiness and one day come to heaven. Think of it like this: the Holy Spirit has gone before us and, as in the Parable of the Tenants in today's Gospel, the harvest is ready. So let's go into the fields and ask: How can we gather it in? How can we reach those millions of others? The proximate goal of evangelisation is the individual, but the ultimate goal is to leaven society and culture, the arts and sciences, politics and economics, all that people do.⁵

Second, converting Catholics. Our practice rate is just 13%. What can we do about the other 87%? If everyone brought one not-yet-practising Catholic to Mass, we would double our congregations and transform our communities. More worryingly, surveys show that nearly 50% of *practising* Catholics are not even sure God exists.⁶ What can we do then to help *all* Catholics, those who practice and those who don't, come to a deeper, personal love for Jesus in the Eucharist, to be more intentional disciples, to discern their charisms and to become more actively engaged in the Church's mission? Faith has to be about more than a Sunday routine. It's about spiritual flourishing.⁷ It's about vocation, formation and service.⁸ It's about witness at home, at school, in the workplace. Surely every Catholic needs to belong to a formation group, for instance, to Bible study, a prayer team or a charity-work?

Third, complete trust in the Holy Spirit. We need to pray. We are utterly dependent on God and His Providence. Let us become one with the Heart of Jesus. Let us open our hearts to the Holy Spirit. Let's ask Him to fill us with ardour and zeal, passion, joy and creativity. May He inspire new methods and new ministries, changing our ecclesial culture from maintenance to mission. Doing more of the same will not work.⁹ We need fresh energy and vitality. Led by the Spirit, let us ask God to make us once again a young, vibrant, missionary Church, faithful and bold, modern and welcoming.

And fourth, outward-looking. All our parishes and schools need to be outward-facing service-centres, especially for refugees, the poor, the needy. Parishes that focus on 'building community' easily become members' clubs, the priest a chaplain, the laity consumers. Yet the Church exists not to build community but communion.¹⁰ Parishes and schools are not ends in themselves or holy-huddles. Jesus has put us here to serve the neighbours.

These four priorities (mission, converting Catholics, trust in God, looking outwards) lead to three specific focuses.

First, on youth, on young singles, women and men, young married couples and young families: what can we do to hand on to them the gift of Faith through the Church's Scripture and Tradition? How can we convert, form and equip them to be joyful missionary-disciples? We have 91 parishes, 40 religious communities, and 76 Catholic schools with over 30,000 students in them. How can we better hand on the Faith to today's youth?

Next, on promoting vocations: that we earnestly pray for, foster and support vocations to all states of life and all ministries in the Church, but especially vocations to the priesthood.¹¹ What fresh strategies can we develop for this?

A third focus, on prioritising resources: that managing wisely our property and finances, we use our God-given patrimony more flexibly and intentionally in the service of mission, evangelisation and service of the needy. Why do we spend so much on buildings but so little on people? Ask yourself: What is your budget for evangelisation? What about our university students, the faith-formation of our teachers, housing the homeless, mission-work in poorer areas or fostering small communities? It's great to build a parish hall, but why? Will it be simply for a select few to enjoy a post-Mass tea and chat, and then for renting out the rest of the week? Or will it be used daily to serve our mission-work, our formation-groups, our charitable activities?

To sum up, Portsmouth people need to be holy people. We need to repent of our sins, to seek communion and to respect legitimate diversity. Catholicism is always a big ship with something for everyone, a 'big-tent Church', big enough for all to find a role. We need to imitate Jesus, love one another and, filled with the Spirit, to foster a joyful, positive, 'can-do' attitude. Christians should never be love-less, gossiping, pigeon-holing or complaining, those Pope Francis calls 'Mr. and Mrs. Whiner'!¹² Nor should we be lacking in obedience, that is, *ob-audire*, 'listening to' what God and His Church asks of us, here and now. Ask yourself: What would Jesus do? As a priest: What does God want of me here? As a layperson: How does God want me to help the Church's mission? How can we foster holiness, love and obedience?

So this is my vision. It is broad and open-ended, a vision that acknowledges all the great work being done already, but one crystallised by the excellent Convocation of Clergy held in Windsor over the summer. It is a vision that can be summed up in one line: *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church*.

Thank you for listening. At my Episcopal Ordination, I asked everyone to pray that I would be a "humble and holy, orthodox, creative and courageous" Bishop.¹³ I make that prayer for you too: may you be faithful and bold. Please ask Mary Immaculate, St. Edmund of Abingdon, and Blessed Pier Giorgio, Patron of our Youth, to pray for our Diocese as we enter the future. Let us ask them to inspire us all in *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church*.

In Corde Iesu + Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth