

BRINGING PEOPLE TO JESUS THROUGH HIS CHURCH

I thank you for being here today and for this opportunity to speak with you.

A few weeks ago, I celebrated my fifth anniversary as the Bishop of Portsmouth, and to mark the occasion, I sent to the Diocese a Pastoral Letter called *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church*. *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church* lays out where I believe the Lord wishes to lead us these next few years and some of the key tasks ahead. In it, for those who cannot remember, I laid out four priorities:

- first, mission and evangelisation: that we enable immeasurably more people to hear the Gospel and so to find in Jesus Christ happiness, authentic human life and one day, heaven. Of the 3.129M people who live in our Diocese, 230K are baptised Catholics. So how do we reach out to those 2.x M other people?
- the second priority is converting Catholics: that we help all Catholics become more intentional disciples of Jesus Christ, that they discern the charisms God has given them for service, and that they become more engaged in the Church's mission. This is about converting 'consumers' into missionary-disciples. But I'm especially concerned for the not yet practicing Catholics, that they come to a deeper love for Jesus in the Eucharist. Of our 230K Catholics, 35K practice. Our practice rate is 13%. So what are we doing for this other 87%? How can our schools and parishes work together on this?
- A third priority is total dependence on God: that we pray more, dependent on the Holy Spirit, that we shift from maintenance to mission, that we are filled with joyful creativity, that we develop new ways of working. We can't keep doing what we're doing now; it's not working! So what risks should we take?
- And fourthly, to be much more focused on outward-looking service: that our parishes and schools become even greater centres of mission and service, especially to the poor and needy. How can our schools and parishes face outwards?

Now these four priorities (mission, converting Catholics, dependence on the Holy Spirit, outward-looking service) lead us to 3 specific focuses:

- First, on youth, young women and men, young singles, young married couples, young families. We have 91 parishes and 76 Catholic schools with 30,000 youth in them. How can we convert the young? How can we hand on the gift of Faith? How can we equip the young to be joyful missionary-disciples?
- Another focus, promoting vocations: that we pray for vocations to all states of life and ministry in the Church, especially the priesthood. They say we're short of priests, and indeed we are. But we're also gravely short of people, of laity truly converted to Christ, people who love the Church, people willing to take responsibility, who want the Church to work, to *be* what she is meant to be. We need many more 'can-do' Catholics. How can we foster this? How can we encourage more vocations? What about the vocation to be a Catholic teacher?

- One more focus, prioritising resources: that managing wisely our property and resources, we use our God-given patrimony more intentionally in the service of new evangelisation. As Catholics, we are good at building things. But what about investing in people? For instance, I would like us to target more resources at University chaplaincies, to give better formation to our teachers and school chaplains, and to house the homeless and to help refugees.

The last aspect of the vision is crucial: the need for holiness. Portsmouth people need to be holy people. We need a greater love for God, a greater love for one another. Catholicism is always a big tent with something for everyone, full of legitimate diversity. We should never be loveless, forever complaining, those Pope Francis calls ‘Mr. and Mrs. Whiner’!¹ Holy persons have positive, 'can-do' attitudes. We should ask every day: What does Jesus want me to do? How can I help the Church’s mission?

So that is a summary of the vision ahead. It is broad and open-ended. It was crystallised at the excellent Convocation of Clergy held in Windsor over the summer. It is a vision that can be summed up in one line, a strapline: *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church*. It now needs to be strategised.

Since becoming Bishop, one of my happiest memories has been the visitation of all our schools. I wanted to visit the schools, because parishes and schools are the two principle agencies of the Diocese’s mission. If our parishes are Catholic Eucharistic Communities, our schools are Catholic Formation Communities for teachers, staff, parents, governors and children. Schools reach people parishes often do not. They serve three basic constituencies: practicing Catholics (a minority), not yet practising Catholics (a majority) and ‘people of good will’ who want Catholic education. I wanted to visit the schools in order to value them, to encourage you, and to support all the wonderful work being done. It led me to lay out a vision for Catholic Education in another Pastoral Letter *The Future of our Catholic Schools* issued last October.

The schools visitation also set a context for the decision made by Trustees in 2015 to ask our maintained schools to convert into academies, to be incorporated into four MATs. I thank you enormously for your willingness to do this and for the huge act of trust you made in me, your Bishop and in our Diocese. I know that for many of you it was an unpopular decision. It was a hugely demanding process often without visible benefits. It left you with unanswered questions, frustrations over unresolved issues, a sense of being ‘done to’ rather than being involved, plus insuperable financial challenges. I am sorry for the additional strain as school leaders this process must have put on you. These last two years, we have all put much time and energy into the Academisation Project and I thank all of you for your efforts. I also thank Stephen Morgan for all his efforts leading this project. As the recent Trustees statement explained, the project has been derailed by a shift in government policies and the

¹ “A Christian who constantly complains, fails to be a good Christian: they become Mr. or Mrs. Whiner, no? Because they always complain about everything, right?” *Homily at Mass, Vatican City, 7th May 2013*. See <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/good-christians-dont-whine-about-suffering-pope-says/> (September 2017)

much more difficult financial climate. I know the recent decision to halt the process is for many of you a relief. But even so, I am really sorry we have had to change course. The causes were outside our control, but it is still something of a disappointment.

Let me ask this: Why did we want the schools of our Diocese to academise? Yes, at the time government policy suggested that every school must one day convert, and so it seemed right, for the sake of Catholic education, to get ahead of the curve. There were also financial incentives to convert. But fundamentally, why did the Bishop and Trustees want the schools of our Diocese to academise? --Fundamentally, because academisation was a vehicle to enable a bigger and much more noble ambition.

It seemed to me that academisation would provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to preserve our schools, and to deepen the Catholic identity, life and mission of our schools. Our schools exist to make Jesus Christ better known and better loved, forming disciples of Christ within His Body the Church. Academisation seemed like a real opportunity to turn the ship, to drive up Catholic standards and to embed our schools vitally and intrinsically into the culture, structures and life of the Diocese. By grouping schools together, just as parishes are grouped into Deaneries and Pastoral Areas, we hoped to overcome any 'silo' mentalities and enable mutual collaboration, support, governance and benefits for the sake of the whole. We could share personnel and good practice, with economic gains through the purchase of common services. Academisation also gave a destination for any school falling into a negative OFSTED category. But above all, I saw the MATs as providing structures, programmes and career paths to help recruit, retain and form Catholic teachers and Catholic leaders. Of course the MATs will continue to exist for those schools that have already converted and for those that wish to convert, but the halting of the overall project might at first seem to some like a catastrophe, the end of all these ambitious hopes and objectives.

Yet, surely that is not the case! There is no need for us to lose the baby with the bathwater. Over these last two years, through our work on this common project, I believe we have gained a new spirit of collaboration. We have gained a broader and more willing cooperation. We have gained a more detailed picture of the challenges individual schools face. We have gained a new working relationship with our independent schools. We have gained a new central office in Portsmouth, in which CASO is based. We have gained a new sense of being a Diocesan family of schools. We have gained wisdom and insight as a Diocese into how we might preserve, strengthen and develop our Catholic schools in their mission of *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church*.

I would like us to continue to aspire to our objectives but within a mixed economy of VA, academies, federations, independents and free schools. Yes, the mechanism has been halted, but not the project. We must not lose sight of our goals, our aims and ambitions, the aspirations for which we set out. In other words, using other devices, I would like us to continue working towards what the main project sought to achieve. The MATs will continue as MATs, but I would like them to continue as broad regional groupings of schools in the Diocese. We have four brilliant patrons: Blessed

Piergiorgio Frassati, St. Edith Stein, St. Mother Theresa and Blessed John Henry Newman. Indeed, from today, I would like to bestow upon our Independent Schools a group patron too, if they would accept him: St. John Paul II, a pastor with a big earhart for the young. So may these five holy men and women pray for us in the times ahead as we look for new ways of achieving what we set out to do.

To take things forward, I wish to announce several initiatives.

First, I have asked CASO to establish in my name a new diocesan Education Steering Group to look at formulating practical strategies to achieve our key objectives. I would ask you to nominate to CASO those you think with the skills and insight to serve on this body. I would like this group to be really representative and to consider how to implement the vision for Catholic education laid out in the Pastoral Letters. How, for instance, as Catholic Formation Communities can we help parents truly become the first educators of their children in the Faith? How can we develop evangelisation strategies for the differing constituencies (the practicing, the not yet practising, the people of good will)? How can we offer an integrated training and formation programme for our 350 foundation governors, with opportunities for regular gatherings with the Bishop? And a crucial one: How can we develop appropriate structures, programmes and career paths to help recruit, form, retain and develop Catholic teachers and future Catholic leaders? To be designated a Catholic School is a privilege dependent on the Bishop's *recognitio* and so one of the tasks of this steering group will be consider the new CES protocols on the relationship of schools to Dioceses.

I am also establishing an Educational Stewardship Group to look at how together we can fund the work of CASO whilst ensuring transparency.

Going with this will be a new diocesan School Business Managers Forum to advise and assist all our schools in order make real economic gains through the purchase of common services and to facilitate tendering for best value contracts.

CASO operates within the diocesan Vicariate for Education. I have asked CASO to work more closely with its sister, the Department for Educational Chaplaincies led by Fr. PJ Smith and his team, which coordinates our youth services, school and university chaplains and mission to youth. Together with you, CASO and the Department can integrate better our youth and educational services, bringing new energy to our mission to youth.

I have also asked Edmund, Catherine and Robert Dare to work with you on reviewing the Section 48 (Validation) framework. In the Pastoral Letter *The Future of our Catholic Schools* I mentioned some of the things that are important to me about the ethos or identity and character of a Catholic School in the Diocese of Portsmouth: for example, that the entire curriculum is centred on Christ, such that all the subject-areas, especially the sciences, are seen to be interrelated and unified in Him. Diocese of Portsmouth schools should be centres of prayer, ideally with a chapel and/or a

chaplain, with a parish priest as a governor. To help them build up a personal relationship with Jesus, children from Year 5 upwards should learn the art of contemplative prayer and *lectio divina* and have regular periods of Eucharistic Adoration,.

Going forward together, we will need to develop different federations, structures and collaborations at local, MAT/regional and diocesan level, whatever is most expedient for the sharing of expertise, for raising standards and for career progression between schools. A key matter is how we can celebrate and develop the vocation of the teacher. I am sure there are a number of strands to this relating to our NQT training, with maybe a Diocesan award in early career for those making a significant contribution to the Catholic mission of a school, or for a Middle Leader or for an outstanding RE teacher. Through closer links with St. Mary's and other Institutes, we need to develop leadership programmes for Deputy Heads and for Heads/Principals.

Dear Heads and Principals: you are special because you are coworkers with our priests. Just as a priest is the pastor of the parish community, so with him you are the pastor, so to speak, of your school community. As the Bishop, I need to support you better in this critical pastoral role. One idea I have been discussing with CASO from next year is to appoint a senior priest from the Diocese to be available to you as a confidential Personal Chaplain, a Spiritual Director, a support, offering care and formation. Indeed, this afternoon, as a sign of this concern, I am going to impart to you a special blessing at Mass. I want to ask the Lord to send you out from here filled with His Holy Spirit and with all the gifts you need for your ministry, especially wisdom and prudence. I also wish to announce my intention at some point in the not too distant future to undertake another series of School Visitations.

To conclude. It might be tempting when thinking of the halt to our academisation project to feel despondent; after all, despite the challenges we *were* making progress. Yet the objective, the once in a lifetime renewal of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Portsmouth, still remains. We are now in a mixed economy and so we face the huge task of winning over many different hearts and minds to our common cause. Yet to me, and I hope to you too, this post-academisation period is not a season of autumn, the fall, but Springtime, a time full of promise, a time of new birth, energy and growth. Already the Holy Spirit is at work in the heart of every child, woman and man, wooing them towards a deeper personal-passionate friendship with Jesus. Already in our Diocese of Portsmouth holiness is generating creativity, risk-taking and new developments. Already, can-do people are coming forward, people who want change, who want the Church to work, who want to help in any way they can. So as Jesus said to Peter in Luke 5, let us put out into the deep, paying out the nets for a catch! In these days ahead, let us pray to the Holy Spirit that our efforts at *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church* will bear fruit. And let us pray for an even greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that everyone may find in the Heart of Jesus that true, genuine, lasting human happiness and joy for which deep-down they long.

Thank you for listening.