

ADDRESS TO DEACONS 2017

I'd like to speak a little today about our schools and the halting of our academisation project. But before that, let me say how I always look forward to this annual meeting with you, my deacons, and deacons' wives. It's hard to believe it's a full year since we were last here! It's a great blessing we have over 30 deacons in active ministry in the Diocese, together with a number in formation. It would be wonderful to have a deacon in every parish. But deacons are also needed in chaplaincies, in schools, hospitals and prisons. I thank each one of you personally for all that you do, for your loyalty to me, for your example and prayer, not least for your service of the faithful, especially the poor. I am also very grateful to Fr. Peter Hart and his Team for all that they do for the on-going pastoral care of you, and the promotion of vocations to the diaconate.

Fr. Mark has spoken about the Convocation and its follow-up. But I wish to give you an update about our schools in light of the fact that as Bishop and Trustees, we have decided to halt the academisation project. I spoke in detail about this last week at Schools Day in Basingstoke with all our Heads and Chairs of Governors.

We have 76 Catholic schools in our Diocese, including 23 independent schools. Of the 53 maintained schools, 3 are ecumenical schools with the CofE, 46 are primaries and 7 secondaries. It's 5 years now since I became Bishop of Portsmouth and three years ago, I undertook a systematic visitation of all our schools. It took two years. It gave me a good overview and the challenges we face. 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 constituencies: practicing Catholics (a minority 10%), not yet practising Catholics (the vast majority) and 'people of good will' who want a Catholic education. I visited the schools to value them, to encourage staff, and to support the great work being done. It led me to lay out a vision for Catholic Education in a Pastoral Letter in October 2016 called *The Future of our Catholic Schools*. (Hand-out copies)

The schools visitation also gave a context for the decision made by Trustees in 2015 to ask all our maintained schools to convert into academies, to be incorporated into four MATs. The willingness to do this, it is fair to say, varied from school to school, but eventually they all agreed. It was huge act of trust in me and in our Diocese. It was not for many a popular decision. It was a hugely demanding process often without immediate benefits. It left unanswered questions, frustrations over unresolved issues, a sense of being 'done to' rather than being involved, plus difficult financial challenges. It put considerable strain on school leaders. Even so, people set about the task and much time and energy went into the Project. At Schools Day, I thanked everyone for their efforts, and also Stephen Morgan who has led it. However, as the recent Trustees statement explained, the project has been largely derailed by a shift in government

policy and a now difficult financial climate. The decision to halt the process was for many schools a relief. But even so, I am sorry we have had to change course. The causes were outside our control, but it is still a great disappointment.

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 we want the schools of our Diocese to academise? --Fundamentally, because academisation was for me a vehicle or mechanism to enable a bigger and much more noble ambition.

It seemed to me that academisation would provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to 'reboot' our schools, to preserve them, and to deepen the Catholic 'ethos', that is, 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 was a real opportunity to turn the ship, to drive up the catholicity and to embed 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. Not least, the MATs could provide 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 schools that have already converted and for those in the future that wish to convert. But the halting of the overall project might seem to dash all our ambitious hopes.

Yet, as I said at Schools Day, I do not believe this is or should be the case! There is no need 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 among our staff. We have gained a new sense of being a Diocesan family of schools. We have gained wisdom and insight into how we might preserve, strengthen and develop schools in their mission. We have gained a new central office in Portsmouth, in which CASO (our Catholic Academies and Schools Office) is based. We have gained a new working relationship with our independent schools. We have gained a more detailed picture of the challenges individual schools face.

I would like us now to continue to aspire to our objectives but within a mixed economy of VA, federations, academies, independents and free schools. Yes, the academisation mechanism has been halted, but not the project. We must not lose sight of the goals, aims and ambitions, the aspirations for which we set out. In other words, we need new instruments and devices to enable our schools to work towards what the project sought to achieve. The MATs will continue as MATs, but they will also 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, at Schools Day, I bestowed upon our Independent Schools a new group patron too: St. John Paul II, a pastor with a big heart for the young. So I pray these five holy men and women will pray for us in the times ahead as we look for new ways of achieving what we originally set out to do.

To take things forward, I announced several initiatives. First, I have asked CASO to establish in my name a new diocesan Education Steering Group to formulate practical strategies to achieve the key objectives, and I asked heads for nominations to this Group so as to involve them in serving on this body. I want the group to be genuinely representative and to make recommendations as to how to implement the vision for Catholic education laid out in the Pastoral Letter. How, for instance, as Catholic Formation Communities can schools help parents truly become first educators of their children in the Faith? How can they develop evangelisation strategies for the differing constituencies (the practicing, the not yet practising, the people of good will)? How can we develop an integrated training and formation programme for our 350 foundation governors? 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 have also established an Educational Stewardship Group to look at how we might fund the work of CASO going forward.

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

CASO lies 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, who coordinates youth services, school and university chaplains and mission to youth. Together with schools themselves, CASO and the Department can integrate better our youth and educational services, bringing new energy to mission to youth.

I have also asked CASO to work with heads on reviewing the Section 48 (Validation) framework. There is a national project on this at the moment led by the CES, but one of my hopes is that parish involvement and attendance at Mass will be one of the measurable Section 48 outcomes. In the Pastoral Letter *The Future of our Catholic Schools* I mentioned some of the things important to me about the 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, in our diocesan schools children from Year 5 upwards should learn the art of contemplative prayer and *lectio divina* with regular periods of Eucharistic Adoration.

So 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 to celebrate and develop the vocation of the teacher. I am sure there are a number of strands to this relating to 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 Twickenham and other Institutes, we need to develop leadership programmes for Deputy Heads and for Heads/Principals.

Heads and Principals are special because they are coworkers with priests. Just as a priest is the pastor of the parish community, so with him they are the pastor, so to speak, of their school community. As the Bishop, I need to support them 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 them as a confidential Personal Chaplain, a Spiritual Director, a support, offering care and formation.

Finally, I announced my intention at some point in the not too distant future to undertake another series of School Visitations in order to bless and install the new icons with their regional patron saints. This will give me an opportunity to talk about sainthood and holiness as well as to encourage the children to learn about the saints.

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So this gives you an idea of what I said at Schools day. It seemed to get a good reception. Although it was disappointing to have to draw a line under the universal academisation project, I tried to stress that the objective, the once in a lifetime renewal of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Portsmouth, still remains. We will now be in a mixed economy and so, instead of possessing a few levers, we face the huge task of having to win over many different hearts and minds to a common cause. I must ask you often to pray about this, to pray for the work of CASO, and to pray for all involved in our Catholic schools: heads, teachers, staff, governors, children and parents. Yet to me, this post-academisation period is not a season of autumn, the fall. It actually has a sense about it of Springtime, a time full of promise, new birth, energy and growth. I often remind people that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the heart of every child, woman and man, wooing them towards friendship with Jesus in the full communion of His Church. Already in our Diocese of Portsmouth holiness is generating creativity and enabling us to take a lot of risks. Already, can-do people are coming forward, who want change, who want the Church to work, who want the Church to be what she needs to be. So please pray for an even greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that everyone may find in the Heart of Jesus the happiness and joy for which they long. Thank you for listening.

I wish to end with a question: In what ways can deacons assist in our schools?