

ADDRESS TO DEACONS

I'm happy to be with you today, a year since we last met together. I am very grateful to Fr. Peter Hart and his Team for all they do for the care of vocations to the diaconate, and for the on-going pastoral care and formation of you, deacons and wives. I also want to thank each one of you personally for all you do, as deacons of our wonderful diocese, for your loyalty to me as your bishop, for your example, and for all your service of the needs of the faithful, especially the poor.

Introduction: Discerning the Gifts

I want to raise with you three topics, all interconnected. They are in a sense updates on where we are up to as a diocese and as the Church of Christ in this locality. I want to begin with St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians Chapter 12, about the Church as Christ's Body and about the huge variety of spiritual gifts, talents and ministerial functions Christ establishes in his Church through the Holy Spirit:

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; **5** and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; **6** and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. **7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. **8** To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, **9** to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, **10** to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. **11** All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. **12** For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

He adds:

27. you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. **28** And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. **29** Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? **30** Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

One of the most important tasks of any bishop, priest, pastor, leader, deacon, or minister of the Christian community is to help everyone discern the gifts God has given them for the service of the Church, to help release those gifts, and then to help form, fashion and direct them harmoniously for the work of the whole. The pastor's task is to get to know people, but with an eye to how they might serve the Church's mission. –Because the Church does not exist for herself; she exists in order to evangelise, to spread the Good News, to propose to others Jesus Christ and his offer of salvation, especially to the poor, the needy and the unjustly treated.

1. New Evangelisation

So first, I'd like to invite you to read or reread this book, published in 2012, Forming Intentional Disciples by Sherry Weddell, from the St. Catherine of Siena Institute in Los Angeles. If you've been to the Clergy Formation Days or heard my talk on Being Catholic in a Secular Culture, you will have heard me mention this book. Next summer, I've invited Sherry Weddell and her team to visit the diocese and to launch her Called and Gifted Programme. The Called and Gifted Programme is designed to help ordinary Catholics in the parishes to discern the gifts and talents, the charisms God has given them. It's a three-step programme, which you can read about on their website. It includes a one-hour personal interview with each person to help them draw up an inventory of their gifts, followed by a 'Discernment in Depth' seminar. I hope eventually 1500 people from the diocese will take part in this.

Two features of Weddell's book to mention. First, her research. Almost 80% of Catholics are 'inactive' or non-church going (lapsed as we used to say), but interestingly many of these convert to Evangelicalism, notably among ethnic communities such as the Portuguese, Poles and Nigerians. The reasons they convert are not necessarily because of the up-beat style of worship in evangelicalism, nor because of the Church's teachings, the clergy abuse-crisis or a marriage issue, but surprisingly, because they say their spiritual needs are not being met in the Catholic Church. It's staggering that 40% of **practising** Catholics, when asked, say they do not have a personal relationship with God. Many practicing Catholics do not believe in a loving God with whom they can have a life-changing relationship - despite going to Mass, or being involved in the parish, or even working in the parish office. In any parish, Weddell says, the number of motivated, or as she calls them 'intentional', disciples is often just 5%. From my own experience, I know she's right: it's always the same few people who come to everything.

Consequently, as I've said before, I believe the time has come to put all the resources of our diocese at the service of helping people to pray, to find God, to experience the love of God in their life, to commit to God, to learn the art of praying, to develop a personal-passionate friendship with Jesus Christ, to grasp personally what his death and resurrection means for them, to have a real sense of being personally chosen by Christ to be his disciple. As Catholics we have huge resources for this in two millennia of spiritual theology, in the lives of the saints, the wisdom of the clergy, and in our rich Tradition. Many of us can talk church-talk, sacraments, theology. But how often do I speak about my prayer, my spirituality, my love of God, and what the death and resurrection of the Lord means for me and my life?

This brings me to a second feature in Weddell's book: conversation. The Church is calling us to the work of new evangelisation, which in the words of Blessed John Paul II is an evangelisation "new in its ardour, new in its methods, and new in its expression." I've discussed this elsewhere, that evangelisation is a two-way movement, breathing-in and breathing-out: that first it is about ourselves being evangelised, fired-up and formed by the Gospel (breathing-in) as well as reaching out to others with the Good News (breathing-out). As Catholics in Britain, evangelisation can make us feel uncomfortable. It makes us think of Pentecostalism or bible-bashing. We take refuge in that saying of St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words". Obviously, our personal example, our character, our practical concern for others can speak volumes. But in today's 21C secular culture, we need words, images, new methods, new media and to be creative. Sherry Weddell proposes five different levels of evangelistic conversation that any Catholic can be trained to engage in: on the bus, with friends, at work or in school. It can mean anything from dropping into the conversation, "When I was at Mass the other day..." to facilitating a deep sharing of personal faith-stories.

2. The Framework for Collaboration

Let me now move on to a second topic. As you know, we have now restructured the diocesan curia and we have begun the process of rolling out the new Framework for Collaboration (see handout). The purpose of the diocesan curia is to assist the Bishop in the pastoral care and direction of the diocese. The new structure, as we have noted before, is thoroughly Christ-centred, based on Christ's three-fold mission as Priest, Prophet and King. This is why there are three Vicariates. But if you read it across, the structure also represents the call of the disciple, the formation of the disciple, and the sending of the disciple on mission, and in this way, everything is focused on mission and evangelisation. Hence we have three Vicariates, respectively

Vocation, Education and Evangelisation, each with their two departments and various sub-departments. The Framework is led by the Bishop and the Bishop's Council, and involves departments and teams of lay men and lay women, religious, deacons and priests.

You can read more about all this on the diocesan website. In time, I hope our parishes and pastoral areas will have structures and teams that in some way mirror the diocesan Framework, and thus devise and lead policy and projects on the local level in collaboration with the curia. I also hope that the curial teams will collaborate with each other on common projects. For instance, next year is the 100th anniversary of the First World War, and so there could be a number of joint projects across the diocese led by teams linked together from our schools department, the civic relations unit, the liturgy team, and so on.

Now I want to say a word about the teams, because we are currently recruiting to some of these. There are basically four types of team:

- Employees of the diocese, such as in the schools department;
- Then, teams of support-staff that assist a director, such as the diaconal team that helps Fr. Peter;
- Thirdly, teams formed of specialists that act like professional bodies or associations, such as the team of hospital chaplains;
- And fourthly, all the other teams: e.g. the Marriage and Family Life Team, Ministry to Marginalised and Inactive Catholics, the Justice, Peace and Social Responsibility team, and so on.

It is this fourth category of team, I want to highlight. These are teams of volunteers, mainly of laity and lay-led. We envisage them meeting about six times a year to pray, to discuss and devise policy, to form themselves and to form others, to sponsor projects, and to encourage and enable pastoral areas and parishes, the clergy and people at local level, to carry out the designated task, e.g. activities relating to justice, peace and social responsibility. The Bishop's Council will appoint the team leader and also a chaplain, and sometimes the Bishop's Council will appoint a specific expert as a team-member. But the rest of the membership of the team, typically comprising twelve members, is open to anyone from across the diocese, anyone who wishes to apply. Members will be appointed initially for 12 months, and then, subject to annual appraisal, for three years, and since they form the diocesan curia, members will receive a letter of appointment from me as the Bishop. To belong to a team, a person must be a practising Catholic, 18 years old or older. They should be 'mainstream' Catholics, in communion with the Holy Father, happy to work under the direction of the Bishop's Council. We hope the teams will consist of a good balance of women and men, of geographical spread across the diocese, and also of age ranges (18-25, 26-40, 41-60, and 61+).

An interview and recruitment process is involved and application forms can be found on the diocesan web-site. As deacons, I would like to ask you to identify team-members from your parishes and communities, especially if there is, for instance, a person interested in outreach to lapsed Catholics or a parishioner keen on ecumenism. Please try to discern this and also to look out for young people. On the website, you will find team-descriptors that explain the purpose and scope of each team. Following on from the Diaconal Skills Survey, I am going to approach some of you, deacons and wives, directly over the next few weeks to ask you if you might be willing to join a particular team, either as a leader, chaplain or member. I want very much to involve deacons in a wide range of evangelistic activities across the diocese, and this is a great opportunity. So I will be contacting some of you shortly. Otherwise, please consider volunteering for something you are interested in: you could email me directly. The Framework for Collaboration is an exciting project; it is unique. I

don't know of any other diocese doing what we are doing here in Portsmouth. God has enriched our diocese with outstanding people with many gifts and talents. Please ask God's blessing upon the discernment process.

3. The Diaconate

We have been talking about discerning gifts, which brings me to the third topic: the diaconate.

I wish to thank you for the work you have been doing this weekend on the Liturgy and the ars celebrandi, the art of celebrating the sacred liturgy. I also want to thank Fr. John Chandler, our Diocesan MC, for his excellent input. The Church's liturgy has a special role in the new evangelisation. We all know this instinctively. Baptisms, weddings and funerals can be unique moments for proclaiming the *keygma*, for evangelisation, for reaching out to the unchurched. But so too is the most sacred liturgy of all, the Mass. For an outsider coming in, the Mass can often be a powerful experience. This is why, I want to underline three things.

First of all, that we make it our business as deacons to carry out the sacred actions and the sacred words of the liturgy exactly in accordance with what the Church asks of us, the rubrics, not more not less, so that anyone coming into church for the first time can receive exactly what the Church intends, that is, the best practice.

Secondly, that we give attention as deacons consciously to developing the habit of using the sacramentals the Church gives us. I am thinking of those simple gestures such as bowing the head at the Holy Name of Jesus, genuflecting when passing the Tabernacle, making the Sign of the Cross when passing a church or when seeing a funeral-hearse go by, saying grace before meals, installing a devotional object in the car, wearing a clerical collar when on duty, keeping special the fast-days and the feast-days and so on. Many too-clever-by-half Catholics dismiss all this as traditional clap-trap, yet these are the very things that generate a culture. They speak volumes to outsiders and in a simple way give witness to what we are about, that we are different, we are Catholics and disciples of Christ.

And thirdly, that as deacons each of us develops a truly graceful ars celebrandi: that the liturgy is a sacred art-form, that it has a style, that in the sanctuary we stand, sit, speak and move liturgically. The Person who celebrates the liturgy is not the bishop; it is not the priest and it is not the deacon. The One who celebrates the liturgy is Jesus Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit, He is offering Himself to the Father, and so in the liturgy we are always 'under' him; we are always standing 'behind' him; we are always substituting for him. There is a sense in which as liturgical ministers we ought to be invisible in the liturgy, underneath it or entirely behind it, doing its words and gestures almost in the background. Sometimes the phrase 'to preside' is taken in a Protestant sense, as if the bishop, priest or deacon is the coordinator. Worse, for some 'to preside' means to be a compere, fronting the show. No, the liturgical minister is re-presenting the Person of Jesus Christ. He is acting in persona Christi. He is putting Christ first, not himself.

Now all this is one of the key reasons why I decided to switch our diaconal formation programme to Oscott College, even though I know it is a long way to travel and this will be demanding. The Oscott programme of diaconal formation is not for a degree. Nor is a cut-down seminary-course nor a topped up catechetics syllabus. The programme starts from what a deacon needs to know, understand and be able to do, on the knowledge,

understanding and skills a deacon needs. It focuses on liturgical formation, and on the formation of human relationships within a community. Deacons share in Christ's three-fold ministry as priest, prophet and king. Traditionally, the stress is on the deacon as a minister of charity. The Oscott programme links this to the Ministry of the Word, being an evangelist in contemporary culture, being engaged in the dialogue between faith and culture, and the need to preach well, to catechise and to communicate the Catholic faith. In other words, it was because the programme was so practical and so clearly focused on new evangelisation, that we have moved formation to there. Nowhere is perfect, of course, but please pray for our diaconal students in formation.

I would like to ask you to pray for vocations, to every state of life and ministry within the Church, and not least the vocation to marriage and family life, the focus of the Extraordinary Synod next year. But please pray for many more vocations to the sacred priesthood, and also to the diaconate. It seems to me that part of this prayer is the need to pray for the gift of discernment, that is, to create within our parishes and communities a culture of vocation, an awareness that each one of us has been called personally by Jesus Christ to be his disciple, and that we have been given a unique task, ministry and state of life in the Church. How can we help each other to discover this? That is the task, the gift of discernment, for which I ask you to pray.

Conclusion: Towards a Portsmouth Vision of Diaconate

Let me finish by returning to what we began discussing last year: a vision for the Portsmouth Diaconate. I would say the key thing is for our deacons to develop a truly 'diaconal heart,' that is, to be men configured to Jesus Christ the Servant, men who love and serve the people with Christ's love, because they have a strong sense of their vocation and their sacramental identity. In this, daily prayer is essential: the Divine Office, daily Mass if possible, the Rosary, the study of the gospels, *lectio divina*, and the study of the teachings of the Church, especially the *Catechism*. The vocation of the deacon is to configure himself and his life to Christ the Servant. Christ must increase; I must decrease. I must live for Him not for me. I must be a man for others, not a man who makes the whole world revolve around himself. Speaking as your bishop, I cannot think of any better way to acquire and develop such a spirituality than by spending, regularly, indeed every day if you can, at least 30 minutes in silent prayer and adoration of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. In other words, I would wish Portsmouth deacons to be distinguished by their holiness of life, their humility, their Christ-like spirituality, their personal-passionate love for Jesus above all in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

What a deacon is, is one thing; what deacons do is very varied. Most of you are appointed to assist our priests with the pastoral care of their parishes within the various pastoral areas. Yet deacons need not necessarily be appointed to or restricted to parishes. What other needs do we have in the diocese? What about chaplaincies in schools, hospitals, prisons, travel centres and shopping centres, parish administration, spiritual direction, interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, marriage preparation and support, counselling and human development? Indeed, what about those of you deacons who are working and so are present as sacred ministers in secular domains and secular professions? What about the role of the deacon within his family? I have been speaking about using our deacons within the curia, the Framework for Collaboration, and I want to invite you to become involved in this over the next weeks. As the bishop, I would like to encourage younger candidates to come forward and also to promote more energetically the vocation to the diaconate. This is something I intend to take up initially with the Bishop's

Council, with the Vocations Promoter, and with the priests and people across the diocese.

But again, let me end by thanking all of you profoundly, on behalf of Our Lord and His Church, for all that you do as deacons, for all you do as deacons-wives and for all that you deacon-students aspire to be: for your witness, your example, your fidelity, your loyalty, your hard work and your love. It is not easy being a disciple today. It's not easy being a Catholic today. It's not easy at all being a deacon, a priest or indeed a bishop today. Yet we know that Christ is the Way. We know that Christ is the Truth. We know that Christ is our Life and that we must do everything we can to find him, to sit at his feet, to imbibe his Word, and to draw Love from his Heart. For it's in Him alone that human beings can find that true, genuine, lasting human happiness and fulfilment for which they long.

Please pray for me – as I do for you every morning in Bishops House. Thank you for listening.