



FOLLOWING UP THE YEAR OF FAITH

*Message from Bishop Philip Egan
to the Clergy and People of the Diocese of Portsmouth*

The Year of Faith ended with the Feast of Christ the King on 24th November 2013. In the Diocese of Portsmouth, we concluded this grace-filled Year by consecrating ourselves, both as individuals and as communities, in our parishes and our schools, to the Sacred Heart of Christ and by placing ourselves once again under the patronage of Mary Immaculate and St. Edmund. People, however, have been asking whether there might be some kind of follow-up to the Year of Faith.

In the *Letter of St. James* we read this:

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. ... For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead” (James 2: 14-17, 26).

In the light of what St. James says, I wish to announce a ‘Year of Faith in Action.’

This Year of Faith in Action will run throughout the 2014 liturgical year and conclude on the Feast of Christ the King, 23rd November 2014. I envisage the Year of Faith in Action to be determined by individuals, by parishes and pastoral areas, and by the teams that make up our new diocesan Framework for Collaboration. It will be a year of action, a year of good works, a year of putting faith into practice through deeds of justice and charity in the local community. I will explore this further in the New Year in a Pastoral Letter to be issued on 12th January 2014, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

By this Year of Faith in Action, I wish to invite everyone in the Diocese to put their faith into practice in a work of practical charity. This will also link with our Confirmation Follow-Up programme or *mystagogia* and with our new Youth Programmes in the diocese. I wish to encourage everyone to develop all sorts of new initiatives. Pope Francis has frequently called the Church to be a Church for the poor; he has said that we need to transcend our comfort zones in order to serve those on the margins. In response there are many things we might do, depending on local needs: food banks, credit unions, the care of the homeless, the support of addicts, visiting the sick, looking after a relative in need, working with the SVP, loving the lonely, helping the elderly, protecting the unborn child, consoling the dying, assisting young parents and the needs of families, campaigning for justice, befriending immigrants, upholding human dignity from conception to natural death, etc. Parishes and pastoral areas could review the needs of their local communities to discern what new or additional works might be required, and whether these works might be effected ecumenically or in some form of (appropriate) partnership with civic authorities and other organisations. The global financial crisis has had a deep impact upon many individuals and families in the UK. Without diminishing our usual concern for the alleviation of poverty elsewhere in the world, the Year of Faith in Action could make us more aware of the issues of poverty at home, inspiring us to devise projects to tackle local needs, as well as involving everyone in campaign actions to critique the causes of poverty.

During the Year of Faith in Action, I wish to invite you to read again and to base everything you do on Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* ('Love in Truth') about authentic charity and its nature.

Catholics have always been noted for their generosity and their practical concern. A sign of a parish's vitality is its charitable activities, although this should never degenerate into mere philanthropy, 'do-goodery', mindless activism or constant fundraising. Authentic charity stems from the heart, indeed, from our love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. It is because of our personal-passionate love for Jesus Christ that we care for those in need, seeking to offer in a practical way the comfort of the Gospel. For the Jesus we love in the Eucharist is the Jesus we serve in the poor, and the Jesus we love in the poor is the Jesus we serve in the Eucharist. Deeds of justice and charity, in other words, are a concrete expression of the new evangelisation.

I wish to make a further announcement. During the Year of Faith in Action, in response to Pope Benedict's Apostolic Letter "motu proprio" *Intima Ecclesiae Natura*, we will establish 'Caritas Portsmouth.' This new diocesan agency will radicalise, support and develop the charitable activities of the diocese. Its base will be in the Parish of The Holy Family, Millbrook and I will give further details about this soon.

Let me finish with the Lord's words in the *Gospel of St. Matthew*.

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. ... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25: 34-36, 40).

I pray that the Lord Jesus, Whose Heart is the abode of justice and charity, will have mercy on us all during this Year of Faith in Action. Indeed, may He fill you, your families and your friends, with the gift of his friendship and eternal happiness.

In Corde Iesu

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Philip". The plus sign is a simple cross, and the name "Philip" is written in a cursive, flowing script.

Bishop of Portsmouth

Feast of Christ the King
24th November 2013