

MESSAGE TO MEMBERS OF THE ABU BAKR MOSQUE

Dear Friends, I thank you for the huge joy and privilege of visiting your beautiful *Abu Bakr* mosque today. I am Bishop Philip Egan, the Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth. Originally I come from Manchester and so I do ask your prayers for the people of that city, after the terrible bombing last week. But I live in Portsmouth and our Diocese is a big one. It has 235,000 Catholics. It covers the south coast along to Bournemouth and stretches north to Reading and Oxford. So on behalf of all Catholic Christians in this region, I offer you today our sincerest greetings and prayers for a Happy Ramadan. *Ramadan Mubarak!*

This morning in Rome, our Pope, Pope Francis, has just sent a special message to all our Muslim friends across the world, to assure you of our prayers during this time of fasting, prayer and charity. The theme of his message is *Care of our Common Home*. For as Catholics, we are deeply concerned about the damage our modern lifestyles are causing to the environment in which we live, and also the disorder these lifestyles bring to our families and human relations. Both Muslims and Catholics believe the Earth is holy; it belongs to God. It's His work and so we must treat it with respect. So let us pray that the ecological crisis humanity is facing will call everyone in the world to a profound interior conversion, and to a renewed care for the Earth, our common home.

Let me add one more thought. Great Britain is a highly secular society. Yet you and I, Muslims and Christians, we are people of religion, faith and spirituality. We believe in God, and we believe that every human being is called to know Him, serve Him and love Him, to worship Him and to respect Him, and to find in Him ultimate happiness. It's our task to witness to this in society, so that other people, those who say they have no religion, those who say they're not sure, those who are lost or on the margins, can find their way home to Him. This is why I'd like to ask you to pray also for us Christians, as we pray for you. Together, we have an important task in society and so we need to be strong, solid, authentic in our religion: in a word, holy. Indeed, it's crucial for the well-being and the future of our land, and something to think about as we prepare for the General Election next week.

So thank you for listening. Thank you for your kind and warm welcome. Thank you for giving me the enormous joy and privilege of saying these few words to you in your Abu Bakr mosque. *Ramadan Mubarak!* Please pray for me, and for the Catholic community here in Southampton and across our whole diocese. We are praying for you.