



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP

to be read aloud in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth on
12th January 2014, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

BECOMING A MISSIONARY DISCIPLE

Dear Missionary Disciples,

I am writing to wish you a happy New Year and God's blessing. I also wish to mention three important developments for 2014. But I must begin with a true story about a married couple I met in another diocese. Now in their 70s, they were life-long Mass-goers until recently when their parish was combined with another and the times of Mass were changed to enable the priest to cover both parishes. They always went to 10 o'clock Mass, but now the Mass was at 10.30. They were furious and had stopped going. 'Why?' I asked. 'Because it messes up Sunday lunch,' they said. I was shocked. Casting off the habit of a lifetime, they were depriving themselves of the Holy Eucharist and the parish of their support, all because their lunch would be 30 minutes late.

Today's feast of the Baptism of the Lord is instructive. In recalling the Baptism of Jesus, when the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended and the Father exclaimed 'This is my Son, the Beloved',¹ we should reflect on our own Baptism, when Jesus chose us personally to be His disciple, when he sent the Holy Spirit upon us, and when he sent us out on mission, like John the Baptist, to point out to others the Lamb of God. As disciples of Christ, we are evangelisers sent on mission. I suspect that often since the 1960s, we have concentrated so much on the internal life of the Church – changing the liturgy, building up the parish, the pastoral care of the community - that we have neglected the Church's outward mission to others.² As a result, we have become overly inward-looking, self-absorbed and numerically in decline.

It seems clear to me that what we need, across the diocese, is a huge shift of attitude. Take the Mass. The Eucharist is not only the summit of the Christian life, but its source. It is not like a big meal that afterwards we need to sleep off. No, the Mass should feed and inspire us to go and announce the Gospel and to do good works,³ for an authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church.⁴ Or take the parish. Sadly, some middle-class Catholics look down on

the parish and its clergy as a service-provider. No, the Church is never that. The parish is meant to be a community of missionary disciples, a place to encounter God, a centre of formation, a facility for charitable outreach and a resource for mission. Pope Francis puts it like this: "I dream of a missionary option, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world, rather than for her self-preservation".⁵

To bring about this shift in attitude, I wish to announce three developments, which I hope will help us all to develop an even deeper relationship with God, to recognise the gifts God has given us, and to fill us with missionary zeal.

First, as a follow-up to the Year of Faith, I am asking everyone in the diocese to keep a 'Year of Faith in Action'.⁶ I envisage this Year of Faith in Action to be a year of good works, of promoting justice, of putting faith into practice through deeds of charity especially in the local community.⁷ Pope Francis asks us to be a Church of the poor for the poor⁸ and there are many things we could do such as visiting the sick, supporting addicts, caring for the homeless, looking after a needy relative, loving the lonely, befriending immigrants, protecting the unborn child, helping with a food bank, assisting young parents, and so on. As Christians, our charity is never mere philanthropy, mindless activism or constant fundraising. Authentic charity stems from the heart, from love, indeed, from the love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. It is because of His love for us that we feel impelled to care for those in need and to offer in a practical way the comfort of the Gospel.⁹ So let us ask: Who are the poor in this neighbourhood? What is the meaning of 'poverty' in our local context? What new strategies of assistance and support for those in need can we, individually and communally, put in place?

Secondly, in 2014 we will continue to roll out our new diocesan Framework for Collaboration. I thank you for your magnificent response to the request for volunteers, and currently a recruitment process is underway. There are many places still to fill and much work to be done, and we are particularly seeking male volunteers in the age-range 18 to 25. Is there any way you could help the diocese with its pastoral care services, or with its youth formation-programmes, or with its activities of new evangelisation? The application forms are available on-line or from your parish clergy.¹⁰ When I was working in a parish in the US, I was impressed with how the parish school taught its students to tithe their time, that is, to give 10% of their free time to a voluntary work for the Church. Indeed, in that parish, the care of the sick and housebound was coordinated by a teenager. So I ask you: Could you tithe your spare time to serve Jesus and the mission of His Church?

And thirdly, in the summer, our Department for New Evangelisation has invited Sherry Weddell from the Catherine of Siena Institute, Los Angeles, to establish in the diocese the *Called and Gifted Programme*.¹¹ Time and again research shows that the reason many Catholics lapse, or never practise their faith, is because they do not have, or do not even believe they can have, a life-changing, personal relationship with God.¹² The *Called and Gifted Programme*, which eventually, we hope, will reach thousands of people across

the Diocese of Portsmouth, is about helping people to develop a deeper friendship with God and a keener sense of being chosen personally by Jesus Christ to be His disciple. The Holy Spirit has enriched the people of our diocese with many gifts and talents, and the programme will seek to identify these gifts, in order to release them for the mission of the Church.

To conclude. In the First Reading at Mass today, speaking through Prophet Isaiah, the Lord said "I have appointed you ... to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon" (Isaiah 42:7). Those words, which the Liturgy applies to Jesus, might also be applied to you and me, his disciples. So I ask you to make a New Year's resolution. Please drop into church often and there spend some time with the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, praying for a new missionary joy among the people and clergy of our diocese. And ask the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Star of the New Evangelisation, and St. Edmund our Patron, to guide us with their powerful help and protection.

I will write again in Lent. Meanwhile, may God bless you all with *evangelii gaudium*, the joy of the Gospel.

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

¹ cf. Mt 3: 16-17 (Gospel for Year A). The "baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". Already he is anticipating the "baptism" of his bloody death. Already he is coming to "fulfil all righteousness", that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father's will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins. The Father's voice responds to the Son's acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son. The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to "rest on him". Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism "the heavens were opened" - the heavens that Adam's sin had closed - and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation" *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 536.

² It is important to note that in calling the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Bl. John XXIII was not seeking to make new definitions of doctrine, but to pursue an *aggiornamento*, an updating, a modernisation of the Church's style, discipline, thinking and *modus operandi* for the sake of evangelising the modern world. He wanted the Council to respond positively to modernity and to update those aspects of the Church that could be updated but always for the sake of a spiritual renewal, a 'new Pentecost' to reinvigorate the Church's mission. He also hoped the Council would bring about unity among Christians. See John XXIII's *Opening Speech* at www.ourladywarriors.org/teach/v2open.htm (December 2013)

³ As Robert Rivers puts it, the "Sunday Eucharist is our finest moment as Catholics and is unlimited in its evangelising power ... The power to evangelise ourselves and others comes from God, and most profoundly in the celebration of the Eucharist. ... [But] liturgy is never an action that takes place only within the church building. We eat and drink the Body and Blood in order to become the body of Christ in the world." See R. Rivers *From Maintenance to Mission. Evangelisation and the Revitalisation of the Parish* (New York, Paulist: 2005) 101-102.

⁴ See Benedict XVI *Sacramentum Caritatis* (London, CTS: 2007) 84

⁵ Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium. Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (London, CTS: 2013) 27.

⁶ See *Following Up the Year of Faith. Message from Bishop Philip Egan to the Clergy and People of the Diocese of Portsmouth* (24th November 2013), available at www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

⁷ As the letter of St. James asked, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?" (James 2: 14)

⁸ "This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelised by them. The new evangelisation is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them" *Evangelii Gaudium* 198.

⁹ As Blessed Mother Teresa once said: "In the Mass we have Jesus in the appearance of bread, while in the slums we see Christ and touch him in the broken bodies, in the abandoned children." See Mother Teresa of Calcutta *A Gift for God: Prayers and Meditations* (San Francisco, HarperCollins: 1981/1998) 76.

¹⁰ See www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

¹¹ The *Catherine of Siena Institute* is an affiliated ministry of the Western Dominican Province dedicated to equipping parishes for the evangelisation and formation of lay Catholics for the sake of their mission in the world. See www.siena.org. For more on the *Called and Gifted Programme*, see <http://www.siena.org/Called-Gifted/called-a-gifted>.

¹² See S. Weddell *Forming Intentional Disciples* (Huntingdon, Our Sunday Visitor: 2012) 15-47