



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP  
 appointed to be read  
 in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth  
 on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019, the Twenty-Seventh Sunday of the Year.

## MISSIO

Dearest Friends,

Recently, a teenager told me how he had been brought up agnostic in a non-religious family, but one day a friend shewed him a video on YouTube. It was Archbishop Fulton Sheen, preaching with conviction. It sparked his interest. A few months later, for the first time he went into his local Catholic church, and, to cut a long story short, advancing in faith, he asked for baptism. Now a key helper in his parish, he has since brought a school-friend into the Church too.

This month, October 2019, has been designated by the Holy Father as an Extraordinary Month of Mission.<sup>1</sup> It is a month of renewal, in which the Pope calls us to rededicate ourselves as missionary disciples spreading the Good News. It is a month of prayer, in which we pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It's a month of action: of service, justice and charity to the poor.<sup>2</sup> The Pope wants us to mark the centenary of Pope Benedict XV's ground-breaking Encyclical Letter *Maximum Illud*, which in 1919 reoriented the Church's missionary activity.<sup>3</sup> Since October is also the month of the Rosary, please offer the Rosary each day for the Church's mission both at home and abroad.

Let me add this. God is our loving Creator. He wants us to be happy, to be united with Himself and one day to be with Him forever in Paradise. This is why He is on mission. Indeed, in Himself God is mission. The Blessed Trinity is on mission to the six continents. The Father sends the Spirit to hover over the waters, to guide human history and to labour in the depths of each person's heart, wooing them to Himself.<sup>4</sup> The Father sends the Son, His Word, born in space and time to save us from sin, suffering and death, and to unite us all

together into His Body the Church.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the Church is a Sacrament that continues in history the living mission of the Son, building the Kingdom of God on earth and preparing us for the joys of heaven. Mission, then, is Who God is, and What He is. It is also what the Church is about. As St. Paul VI once famously put it: "The Church exists in order to evangelise, that is, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace."<sup>6</sup>

I have just returned from a conference of bishops in Steubenville, Ohio on turning dioceses from maintenance to mission. Most of us clergy were trained to be good pastors of souls, caring for the flock, rather than active fishers of people, reaching to outsiders. The Extraordinary Mission Month will challenge us all. But something deeper, more lasting, more demanding is needed if our Diocese of Portsmouth is to make the shift from maintenance to mission.<sup>7</sup> We need ambition. We need a long-range strategy. We need a ten-year plan. In the last Pastoral Letter, I announced that in Advent we will embark upon two years of spiritual renewal, first, a Year of God's Word, then a Year of the Eucharist. My prayer is for all of us, clergy and laity, parishes and schools, to be filled with an even greater trust in God the Father, a more passionate love for His Word, Jesus Christ and a more radical dependence on the Holy Spirit. Thus, with our hearts on fire, we will naturally want to reach out to everyone in works of evangelical mission, social justice<sup>8</sup> and charitable service.

It is not easy to 'turn the ship,' which is why I want to ask your help and to ask you what you think. Over the next months I will be asking our clergy for their help, feedback, ideas and suggestions. But I dearly want to hear what you think too. Among other forms of consultation, there will be a questionnaire. I am also going to send out some questions for discussion in small groups. In time, we will summarise and publish the responses. There will be a diocesan Prayer of Renewal to say at Mass and some special Bidding Prayers. The aim is to call us to grow in personal holiness, to renew our relationship with God, to strengthen our Catholic identity, to deepen our communion with a firmer unity of purpose, to engage everyone in the mission of the Diocese, to focus us on works of justice and charity and to ensure our Vicariate Framework teams serve our needs. We cannot be complacent any more.<sup>9</sup> Faith is no longer handed on automatically through families, schools and parishes.<sup>10</sup> What is key today is a real, personal, transforming encounter with Jesus Christ Himself.<sup>11</sup> It is the task of families, schools and parishes to create the arenas in which people can encounter Him. This is what our diocesan mission-statement means: *Bringing People Closer to Jesus Christ through His Church*.

Today's Readings are about faith. "Fan into a flame the gift God gave you," wrote St. Paul to Timothy in the Second Reading.<sup>12</sup> "Increase our faith," the Apostles asked of Our Lord in the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> In these turbulent times in the world and in the Church, let us ask the Lord to deepen our faith. May He make us holier people, modelled on Christ. May He make our Diocese more modern. May He focus our parishes and schools on the proclamation of the Gospel to non-believers and on outreach to the non-practicing. I thank Mary Immaculate, St. Edmund of Abingdon and Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati for their patronage and prayers. I thank Blessed John Henry Newman, to be canonised next weekend, for his inspiring example. And I thank all of you for listening.

In Corde Iesu  
+ Philip  
Bishop of Portsmouth

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<sup>1</sup> For the decree of Pope Francis and numerous materials about the Extraordinary Month of Mission [henceforth EMM], see the dedicated Vatican website: <http://www.october2019.va/en.html> (September 2019). The theme of the EMM is "Baptised and Sent: the Church of Christ on Mission in the World."

<sup>2</sup> For more about this, see the English website of Missio, the papal charity: <https://missio.org.uk/emm/> (September 2019)

<sup>3</sup> The Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* was promulgated after the devastation of WW1, which for many rocked their confidence in Christianity and religion. Its title comes from the first words in Latin that the Pope wrote: "that momentous and holy charge found in Mark 16:15: 'Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to all creation.'" In the Letter, Benedict XV recalls the great missionaries who first took the Gospel overseas. He then reviews the recent history of the missions and proposes that local clergy be formed for leadership of the new churches established. Catholic missionaries are reminded that their goal is a spiritual one, to be carried out in a selfless way while striving for personal sanctity. They must have a deep knowledge of the cultures and languages they work in. He praises the work of female religious. Mission is not only for missionaries; all Catholics must participate, through an Apostolate of Prayer, by supporting vocations, and by financial help. For the text, see: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_ben-xv\\_apl\\_19191130\\_maximum-illud.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xv_apl_19191130_maximum-illud.html) (September 2019)

<sup>4</sup> See my Pastoral Letter (PL04) on the Feast of the Holy Trinity "The Third Person" (26<sup>th</sup> May 2013) available on the Diocese of Portsmouth website. For the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters, see Gen 1: 2. For the Holy Spirit guiding history, see *Catechism* 732; cf. John Paul II *Dominum et Vivificantem* 7. For the Holy Spirit at work in every human heart, see *Dominum et Vivificantem* 53.

<sup>5</sup> See John 1: 1-18. Cf. John Henry Newman "Sermon X. The Spiritual Presence of Christ in the Church" in *Parochial and Plain Sermons IV* (London, Rivingtons: 1881) 120-135.

<sup>6</sup> Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14 (DH 4573).

<sup>7</sup> Here, I am impressed by the thought of Fr. James Mallon: see his *Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission* (New London CT, Twenty-Third Publications: 2014).

<sup>8</sup> To love is to serve. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis always links confession of faith and commitment to society: "To evangelise is to make the kingdom of God present in our world. Yet any partial or fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelisation in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it. I would now like to share my concerns about the social dimension of evangelisation, precisely because if this dimension is not properly brought out, there is a constant risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelisation." (176). *Evangelii gaudium* is available on-line from the Vatican website: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

<sup>9</sup> It is hard to underestimate the fragility and the vulnerability of the Catholic Church in Britain in general, and especially in our diocese. Over the last 30 years in the Diocese of Portsmouth, attendance at Mass has halved to 13%, and this is despite large-scale immigration from Catholic countries. See S. Bullivant *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (Oxford UP: 2019). See also the *Share Your Story* survey that our Diocese of Portsmouth conducted in 2015, now published by S. Bullivant et. al. *Why Catholics leave, What they Miss and How They Might Return* (Mahwah NJ, Paulist Press: 2019).

<sup>10</sup> "God has no grandchildren" as Sherry Weddell succinctly puts it. See S. Weddell *Forming Intentional Disciples* (Huntington IN, Our Sunday Visitor: 2012), especially 15-47.

<sup>11</sup> One of the moments most cherished by the young, as they say time and again, is during silent Eucharistic Adoration. This is why I once again ask everyone, clergy and faithful, to ensure our churches are kept open for prayer and that regular periods of Eucharistic Adoration are scheduled.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Tim 1: 6.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 17: 5