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New Year's Pastoral Letter

Dear People of God,

Happy New Year. I decided some time ago to write to you at the start of this new year and new decade - a time for new beginnings.

In today's feast of the Baptism of the Lord we recall the moment when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and the Father exclaimed 'This is my Son, the Beloved'. We can 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. Have we concentrated so much on the internal life of the Church – dealing with the liturgy, building up parish structures, etc., that we have neglected the Church's outward mission to others? Pope Francis often warns us of a "privatized and individualistic spirituality" EG 262

In 2013 Pope Francis issued the great blue-print for evangelization in our times - *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel. In it he analyses where the Church is at now and where we need to go.

Are you satisfied by what is happening in your parish? Are you happy that young people have so few to minister to them? Are you happy with the way society is going?

As a Church where are we going? What, as it were, is the sign on the bus? What is the vision?

The vision I see is of a Church where people:

- have a real and living relationship with Jesus
- are seeking holiness in their daily lives
- are reaching out to their sisters and brothers, using their gifts from the Holy Spirit to bring the mercy and healing love of God to others.

That is the sign on the bus. It is a vision of a Church which, starting from a relationship with Jesus looks outward rather than inward.

About 90% of our people are not coming to church regularly so we must go out, “and seek the lost” (Lk.19:10) If we take a close look at the culture around us we see the great need for God’s grace and our cooperation with that grace. There is now a new culture which is trying to undo the truths of the entire Judeo-Christian system from the ground up by redefining the meaning of personhood, of marriage, of the family, and classifying people on the basis of their sexual preference, raising individual rights over those of the unborn, and denigrating the sacredness of human life to its natural end.

We must wake up to what is happening and, with the grace of God change the culture from within. If you and I want a culture which is healthy, where family life is helped and supported, where people have hope and can live in freedom to love God and their neighbour as themselves, then we must play our part.

In our Pastoral Plan of June 2019, a way forward until 2024 has been mapped out with material gathered during our listening process throughout the Diocese in 2017/18. There are specific things to do and targets to reach. Will you play your part? You too have a vocation – married life, the single life, the priesthood or religious life. Through your vocation you have a part to play in building up God’s Kingdom.

God has put you where you are to do good.

In the next weeks and months I will be visiting Parish Pastoral Councils to encourage as many as possible to implement our plan.

Part of that plan was to appoint a Youth Ministry Officer and a Faith Development Officer. Both of these appointments have been made but, as the successful candidates are both in employment and study until the Summer they will begin work in the Autumn.

The Alpha Programme is proving popular across the Diocese.

The five NET ministers are going around to schools and some parishes giving their faith testimonies, animating people’s faith to strengthen their relationship with Jesus. In the past year we have welcomed two new religious orders to the Diocese. Holy Family Mission in Glencomeragh is flourishing.

For growth to happen we need prayer. Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*,

“Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer, and to my great joy groups devoted to prayer and intercession, the prayerful reading of God’s word and the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist are growing at every level of ecclesial life.” EG 262

Pope Francis is asking us to fall in love with Jesus Christ the Saviour and bring Him to others.

The Diocesan Eucharistic Adoration Committee is trying to encourage more hours of Adoration in parishes across our Diocese. Nothing good is possible without prayer.

There are so many good things going on across the Diocese and so many more possible. You can keep up to speed with events through the monthly Diocesan E-Newsletter.

Please pray also for vocations to marriage, to the priesthood and religious life. Pray for Declan and Stuart who have begun their seminary training this month and for John and Mark who are continuing their studies in Rome.

I finish with a prayer of the recently canonized St. John Henry Newman

I ask the intercession of Mary and Joseph and of all the holy men and women of this Diocese who are now with God.

The prayer of Newman goes:

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

Every grace and blessing on you all during 2020.

+Phonsie

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord Jan. 12th, 2020