



You Will Be My Witnesses

TEN-YEAR MISSION PLAN
FOR THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PORTSMOUTH

DRAFT



“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and then you will be my witnesses [...] to the ends of the earth” Acts 1:8

The history of our Diocese of Portsmouth is filled with men and women who carried out our Lord’s mission in their time. Through prayer, service, and sacrifice, they built communities of faith and rose to the challenges of their day to **bring people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church.**

Our challenges today may be different, but the dedication and courage of our faithful need not be. Together we can rise to the challenge of building a flourishing future for the Church in our Diocese in a rapidly changing world.

Let us be open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is right to dream, to hope, to trust in God. In our Diocese, there are already many signs of springtime,

with a new energy, a new willingness to change and collaborate, and a new desire to do things differently. So let us trust in God’s providence and resolve to do our best. Then indeed the words of the Lord will be fulfilled, words that inspire us and words that sum up this plan: You will be my witnesses.

You Will be My Witnesses is a ten-year mission plan for our Diocese of Portsmouth. It is a plan for the renewal of every aspect of our Christian lives and an invitation to join in a renewed missionary effort to bring the Gospel to all around us.

The plan comes with my authority as the Shepherd of the Diocese, and it gives everyone a direction in which to travel. But it is a plan that essentially

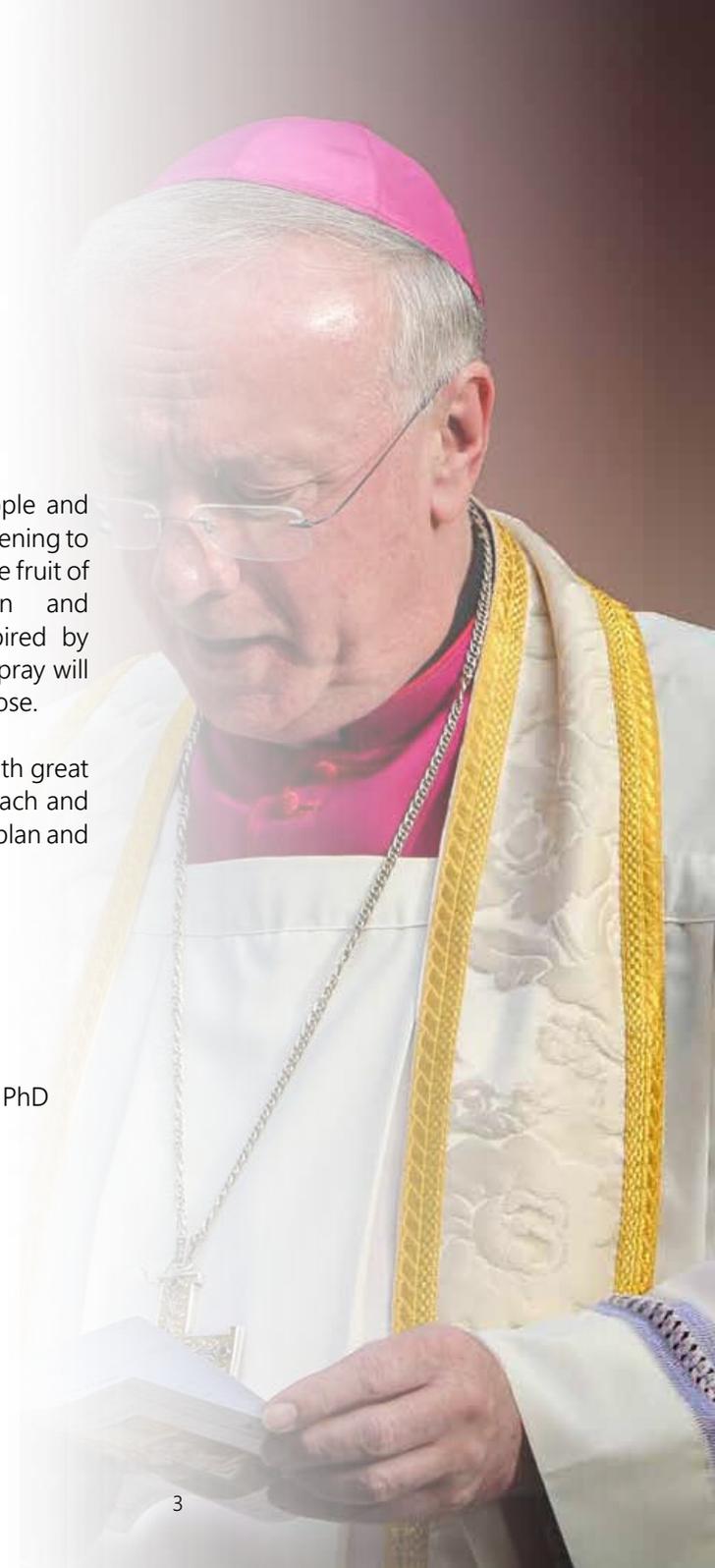
has come from you, the people and clergy of our Diocese, from listening to you and consulting you. It is the fruit of intensive prayer, reflection and discussion. It is a plan, inspired by God’s grace, that I hope and pray will unite us all in a common purpose.

I place this plan before you with great joy and confidence and ask each and every one of you to study this plan and generously respond to it.

In Corde Iesu,

+ Philip

Rt. Rev. Philip A. Egan BA, STL, PhD
Bishop of Portsmouth



“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” Matthew 28:19

The fundamental mission of the Church is to Evangelise; ‘to proclaim the Good News’ of Jesus Christ so that others might freely seek to become His disciples, within His Body the Church. Every member of the Church is called to take part in this work: **bringing people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church.**

Evangelisation is essentially about entering into a personal-passionate relationship with Jesus Christ, as well as reaching out to bring others to Him.

The immediate goal of this work is the individual, but the ultimate goal is to evangelise culture, so that the world we live in can be leavened and infused with the values of Christ and His Gospel. As Christians, we are called to change the world.

The Holy Spirit has led us to this moment. The times are changing, and we are here for a reason. We are in an age for mission and must find new ways to follow the Lord, proclaim the Gospel and bring others to Christ.

It is a journey for the Church and a personal journey for each one of us.



53%

Fall in Mass attendance between 1960 and 2019, and a further 44% fall between 2019 and 2021.



32%

Fall in the number of marriages celebrated in our Diocese between 2010 and 2019.



35%

Fall in the number of baptisms celebrated in our Diocese between 2010 and 2019.



63%

Fall in the number of diocesan priests between 2022 and 2042 (estimate)



35%

Fall in the number of people received into the Catholic Church in our Diocese between 2010 and 2019.



“For I know the plans I have for you, declared the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” Jeremiah 29:21

This is a new age; we are in mission territory.

The fastest-growing religious affiliation in the UK is “none”. Here in our Diocese, change in practice is also deeply felt, and we see similar trends.

In 1960, some 70,000 people were attending Mass in our Diocese and giving life and vibrancy to their communities. By 2019, a year before the covid-pandemic, this had halved to 32,000, and the most recent Mass count in 2021, albeit still in a time of restriction, was recorded around 18,000.

Mass attendance and participation in the sacraments are declining steadily over time. As our congregations age they are missing the vitality support and activity of younger generations. More priests are retiring than are being ordained to replace them. Our priests are pulled in many directions, stretching themselves to live out their vocations.

Ministering to our parishes, schools and chaplaincies is falling on ever fewer resources; clergy, lay, and financial. Few of our parishes, which together comprise around 140 churches, are in a sustainable financial position for the long term.

One possible response to these challenges would be to attempt to muddle through the next few years, relying on short term expedients to preserve the current models of parish life whilst serving ever-fewer people.

However, this is not a sustainable strategy. Not least because materially we cannot sustain the decline, but most importantly because this will not allow us to invest in realising our mission of bringing others to Christ.

How do we work together to meet these challenges?



"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"
Matthew 28:20

Faced with these challenges and looking ahead to the next ten years, we must turn again in confidence to our Saviour, who promises to remain with us always, *"to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20).

We must give thanks for the hard work of our Catholic faithful and commit ourselves to preserve what is good and what is still working. We must also, however, address the challenges we face courageously. We must seek to revitalise our efforts to evangelise the world, to share the faith through catechesis and works of mercy, and to rebuild God's Church with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

To do so, we will need to make some radical changes to the way we organise our parish life, re-examining our structures and works in the light of our reality today.



“But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’

Matthew 18:26

We pray for a people of God centered on Christ...

Who thirst for a deeper relationship with Him, and whose thirst is watered through inspiring liturgy, meaningful formation, prayer and service.

Who are accountable for the care of His flock and the fulfilment of His great commission. A people who recognise their shortcomings and seek to learn from the past.

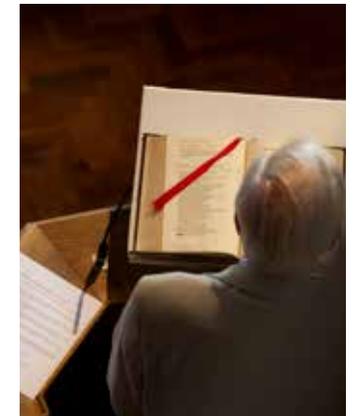
Who are all missionary disciples. Who, whatever their position in the Church or their level of formation, are confident agents of evangelisation.

Who form a Church confident of its identity and its role in the wider world. A Catholic Church which seeks to overturn preconceptions through example and witness.

Who come together as Catholic communities unafraid to look beyond the parish walls and meet others where they are. A Church which takes an active part in the care for creation, which seeks to address the ills of our age, loneliness, isolation, addiction, poverty and injustice, and which brings respite to those in need.

Who live as Catholic communities, which are fully alive, growing and have a clear sense of mission. Whose parishes, schools and chaplaincies are properly served and resourced to go out, make disciples, and be life-giving communities.

Who make up vibrant and welcoming communities of parishes, schools, families, and individuals. Communities where everyone feels a sense of belonging and experiences the love of the faith community, regardless of their background, age, current state of life, origin or closeness to God and His Church.



“Thomas said to him ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” John 14:5-6

Discernment is key to any transformation. The priorities set out in our Ten-Year Mission Plan are a direct result of the last two years spent talking and listening to people across the Diocese. Together we have discerned the following priorities:

								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Putting Christ at the centre of everything we do, especially our celebration of the liturgy.	Providing life-long formation for clergy to support contemporary ministry.	Forming lay people at all stages of life and faith.	Nurturing our young people to become missionary disciples.	Growing chaplaincy and enabling local missionary communities to respond to need.	Responding to <i>Laudato Si</i> as good stewards of God's creation.	Working with ecumenically with other Christians on areas of shared priority.	Stewarding our resources to enable mission.	Building a sustainable, cohesive and effective structure for mission across our parishes and schools.

For the sake of the People of God of today, and those of tomorrow, each local missionary community must **work together to discern how to meet the needs of the Church today and how to best allocate her resources.** Each of our faithful must consider their potential to live their life as an instrument of Christ. Each of our priests and deacons must discern how to live out his vocation most effectively and **enable fruitful mission.**

“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’...I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in their respective communities.”

Evangelii Gaudium 33

“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, so that it may bear more fruit” John 15:2

We will need to face the future together, with courage and hope; huge change is needed, and the landscape of our Diocese will look different to that of today.

Our discernment has led us to designating 24 newly-defined pastoral areas from our existing parishes. These areas will work to form single parishes over the next 3 to 5 years. This will be shaped and led by our local communities, with local plans received by Bishop Philip in Summer 2023.

Local mission plans will respond to each aspect of our Ten-Year Mission Plan. They will consider how the local worshipping community will be structured and resourced to carry out these priorities. This will include discerning how best to serve the mission of the Church over the next ten years, and deciding which churches to keep, and which to close.

The Church is far more than a physical building; It is the People of God; a faith community striving to be missionary disciples and inspire the world around them. With the time, talent and treasure released from maintaining the structure of the past, we will have the resources to refocus on our priorities, **and keep Christ at the centre.**



A PERSONAL CALL TO YOU

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8*

It would be easy to think that this is the work of the Diocese as an abstract organisation, or the parish priest and a few familiar volunteers. However, parish renewal depends on each of us taking up the call to be missionary disciples with generosity and love.

All of our parishes have been asked to consult on the plan over the next couple of months, so that it can be finalised by the end of the year. You can find more information about the plan at portsmouthdiocese.org.uk. Please do take part in your parish consultation.

Each and every one of us is needed. The renewal of our Church so that we can realise the vision of Jesus Himself. *You Will Be My Witnesses* is an invitation to every person and every parish across the Diocese to come together on this journey.





"Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed" Proverbs 15:22.

Questions for Reflection

- Reflecting on the information we have shared; are there any priorities you feel we have missed from our Ten-Year Mission Plan?
- What else beyond what is set out in the plan, do we need to do to realise this plan as a Diocese, as parishes, as individuals?
- Is there anything further we should take into account when considering the shape of parish groupings?
- Is there any more feedback your parish would like to add?

If you would like to share you feedback with us, please do take part in your parish consultation.





www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk