

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This coming year is a very important one for all of us throughout this Diocese. In 2016 we are to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese East Anglia, and forty years since our first Diocesan Bishop, Alan Clark, was installed in June 1976. We are to celebrate this important event within the context of the New Evangelisation. This is the call of Pope Francis: to share the joy of the Gospel with everyone – to engage with and encourage those who no longer practise their faith or no longer believe; to reach out to the forgotten ones whom society deems unimportant or useless.

Pope Francis reminds us too, that with our open arms and open hearts, Jesus embraces them all with his love and mercy. In his exhortation, *Towards the New Millennium*, Pope Saint John Paul II encouraged us to "remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm, and enter the future with confidence!" Those words resonate for us today in three particular ways. First of all, to "Remember, the past with gratitude". Next year will provide us with many opportunities to remember with fulsome gratitude the past generosity and commitment of all who have helped to make this Diocese a strong and vibrant part of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

Today we mark the conclusion of this year of preparation for the New Evangelisation. Each of our parishes during the course of the past year have celebrated the Forty Hours of Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. We have opened our lives to the possibility of a fresh encounter with Jesus Christ – and the ongoing renewal and conversion that it brings with it. We have been reminded powerfully that whatever plans we make, they will surely fall apart if we do not keep our eyes always fixed on the Lord. For the many graces and blessings of this year we express our gratitude to Him.

Secondly, Saint John Paul tells us to "live the present with enthusiasm!" As a Diocese, we shall best express our gratitude for past generosity and commitment, by the lives we lead today. The commitment we make now will assure that all the good works of the past will continue with the same creative and exciting spirit that marked the beginning of the life of our Diocese. We must remember that the New Evangelisation is essentially two thousand years old!

It goes back to the moment when Jesus sent out in his name, seventy-two of his followers to bring God's love and mercy to his people. It goes back too, to that moment when the Risen Christ commanded his Church to go and "make disciples of all the nations". From the scriptures we see how all were filled with enthusiasm and joy for their mission as they experienced the presence of the Lord, working with them.

As we now move to the second year of preparation for the New Evangelisation, each parish community will be encouraged to set up a team or teams of missionary disciples. These teams will be primarily responsible for helping your parish to discover how you might reach out to those who no longer practise their faith or who no longer believe. They will be helped

in their formation with materials and encouragement from the New Evangelisation Commission. Our Parish catechists are also to play a special part in the work of evangelisation as you carry out your invaluable work in preparing children and adults for the Sacraments.

New diocesan programmes to encourage and assist you will become ready, for your future use, during the course of this year. In all this, as with those first disciples, we must never be far away from the Lord – always gathering around him to hear his message anew and to share in his life-giving grace which we receive through our celebration of the Sacraments. Only he can fill our lives with enthusiasm and excitement in our present tasks.

Lastly, Saint John Paul reminded us to "enter the future with confidence!" Our Diocese has a future! Our present commitment will ensure that the Diocese will continue to witness to the love and mercy of God for many years to come. We must never become despondent, negative or cynical. We must seek always to build up parish communities founded upon love, unity and service. We must work and pray for more vocations to the priesthood; we must continue to prepare our young people to be disciples of Jesus.

We must care for those who are no longer young in our communities. And we must reach out to the wider community and especially to those who are poor and marginalised by society. We must enter the future with confidence!

For the New Evangelisation, 2017 and beyond is a future that we must also enter with confidence. Our parish teams and all who aim to be missionary disciples will begin to share in the ongoing work of the Lord in "making disciples of all nations". So, Let us in this coming year remember the past with gratitude, live the present with a lively enthusiasm and enter the future with confidence!

We entrust our Diocese and all that we are doing to make God's love and mercy known in East Anglia, to Our Lady of Walsingham, to the one who is the Star of the New Evangelisation, "to the one who is the unsurpassed model for all those who follow Christ in love of God and service to their neighbour" (Pope Francis).

Yours devotedly, +Alan S. Hopes Bishop of East Anglia.