DIOCESE OF GALLOWAY

"Year of Prayer to the Holy Spirit"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we celebrate the end of the Holy Year, I am aware that it also marks the end of my first full year as your bishop, and I am continually grateful for my ministry with you. Over that time, I have got to know you just a little bit more.

And I have seen and heard your worries for the Church in Galloway. We do see a Church that is a bit bruised and can feel a bit tired. We can be tempted to feel that things are only going in one direction and, crucially, that things can only go in one direction. But I have also seen parishes, schools and communities of real faith, sure hope and intense love. I have seen so many signs that this is the living Church of Jesus Christ and that we have much to build upon. I want you to be encouraged by this and by the continued call of Christ to follow him and bring him to others.

In my time with you, and in times of prayer, I have wondered how we might take steps to renew the Church in our Diocese, and crucially to understand how the Lord wants us to proceed. And what has caught my imagination is the next Holy Year: 2033 marks the 2000th anniversary of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord. This will be a time of huge celebrations in the whole Church, and I believe it offers a great opportunity for renewal here in Galloway. And that renewal will rest on one question:

How does the Holy Spirit want the Diocese of Galloway to proclaim the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus in 2033?

This means asking where we are as a Church now, how we should be as a Church in 7 years' time, and how to get there. By asking this question, we will find answers that lead us to renewal and change in our Diocese. Over these few years, we can work together in the Lord to discern how best we can respond to that missionary command that is given to us all: Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Good News.

Candida Casa, 8 Corsehill Road, Ayr KA7 2ST
Telephone: 01292 266750 Email: administration@gallowaydiocese.org.uk

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What those changes will be, I do not know. If we approach it in a spirit of suspicion, of protecting our own corner of the Church, of saying things must be the way 'they have always been' then we will be in danger of listening to ourselves and reducing the Church to what suits our personal worship and practice. But if we approach it in a spirit of openness, like the disciples who followed Christ before they knew where that would lead, then we accept that we are part of a Church that is greater than us.

The first thing I am asking you to do is to pray. We all have opinions and ideas, hopes and fears, but it does not start with us. It starts with God. If we do not give him his place, then we will be working in vain. So, before we discuss, decide or act, we must pray asking the Spirit to open our hearts to his will. I am asking you to create an industry of prayer to the Holy Spirit in your private prayer, your homes, parishes, schools and communities.

Only by giving time in prayer can we allow the quiet voice of the Spirit the space to reveal himself to us. And where will this lead us? I do not know! I, like you, must allow myself to be unsettled by a Spirit who might take us to places we do not expect or even want. In our prayer to the Holy Spirit, we ask that he (not we) shall renew the face of the earth.

To help with this, prayer cards have been printed for everyone in the Diocese, for you to pray privately and together. Keep these cards close and pray the prayer often.

I will celebrate a monthly Mass to the Holy Spirit across the Diocese, beginning in the Cathedral on Tuesday 20th January at 7pm and moving around one of the four deaneries each month.

This is the beginning of a process of discernment and renewal in Galloway. It might seem light in practical details. That is deliberate. From the beginning, I do not want us to lose sight of the fact that it begins with the Father's will, the presence of Christ, the action of the Holy Spirit. We will have much to do, and some changes might come sooner rather than later, but we must always have prayer and an openness to God at the centre.

Just as we were invited to look for signs of hope during the Jubilee, so let us listen for the voice of the Spirit in the year ahead.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

With every blessing for the year ahead,
+Francis
11 January 2026
Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord

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