

PASTORAL LETTER – PENTECOST 2019

“You will be my Witnesses”

At every Confirmation ceremony this year I have reminded the children of the drama of the coming of the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost. Then I have told them, with all the conviction that the Church gives, ‘Today is your Pentecost’.

Now, at Pentecost 2019 I want to make a similar proclamation to everyone in the diocese. I want to remind us all of the words Jesus spoke to his followers at his ascension: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and then you will be my witnesses.” (Acts 1:8) He has spoken those words to every one of us who has been called to follow him.

Listen to the words again, addressed to you and me: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and then you will be my witnesses.” And today is our Pentecost,

In the two years that I have spent in the Diocese I have seen many instances of the Holy Spirit at work in our parishes. So many people commit themselves to building community, caring for their neighbour, keeping the torch of faith alive in a new era where faith is often misunderstood and sometimes even despised. I am particularly moved by the many people in the diocese who work to keep faith alive even though the Church has let them down in serious ways.

Still, it is clear that the times we live in call for a new Pentecost. I am convinced that Jesus is saying to us now in a very deliberate way; “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and then you will be my witnesses.”

As I have gone around the diocese since my arrival here I have listened to many people and, after consultation with the Council or Priests I am now proposing five particular areas that we need to concentrate on in the next short time in order to renew ourselves for the work of being witnesses. I have established five committees to work on each of the following areas.

1. Youth Ministry

We will establish a diocesan group to support young adults whose faith is important to them and who want to share it and to learn how to help make disciples of others.

2. Faith Formation

None of us knows our faith well enough. During the coming year we want to offer introductory courses on faith at parish or inter-parish level.

3. Planning the Future Co-Responsibly

We will begin a process of dialogue and discernment at local level to help us plan the future together. This is the role of the Priests and Laity working together. It will involve us thinking creatively about how with a smaller number of priests and dedicated laity we will continue the great Mission of the Church given to us all by Christ.

4. Participation in the Liturgy

Choir leaders from across the diocese have been gathering with me to talk about enhancing our celebration of Mass. We will work towards renewal of the liturgy with special emphasis on congregational singing.

5. Supporting our Catholic Schools

I am consistently reminded how blessed we are in having so many committed teachers in our schools. This past year we have begun offering in-service training in catechetics to some of our primary teachers. It was a blessed experience. In the next few years we are going to build on that great beginning.

St Paul said: "There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord, working in all sorts of different ways in different people."

First Step: Pray

And so, over the next few years there will indeed be all sorts of service as we concentrate on our projects of Youth Ministry; Faith Formation; Planning our Future Co-Responsibly; Singing joyfully at Mass; building up our schools. From today I am inviting you to play your part, first of all by prayer. Let us make praying for the future of the Church here in Raphoe our first step.

Second Step: Reflect

The second step is that each of us take time to reflect on how everyone in this Church is called and gifted by the Holy Spirit, in a way that is suited to his or her circumstances and personality. Some of us are married; others single. Our community is made up people who are older and younger; outgoing and contemplative; practical and academic.

Third Step: Respond to the Holy Spirit

Let us take time to acknowledge and affirm our own gifts and those of the people we know. God has given them to us for a 'good purpose'. The Diocese of Raphoe needs each person to share their gifts with generosity and with the courage given by the Holy Spirit if we want to create a vibrant faith community. Our third step will be to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and use our gifts.

I invite each of you therefore to pray, reflect on your own gifts and to respond to opportunities to place your gifts at the service of God and our community. Listen again to the words of Jesus which are addressed to you:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and then you will be my witnesses."



+Alan McGuckian SJ
Bishop of Raphoe