

Press Release from +Patrick O'Donoghue, Bishop of Lancaster

Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue's essential guide to being a Catholic today

The Diocese of Lancaster published Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue's powerful new book, *Fit for Mission? Church* on Wednesday 27th August. Bishop O'Donoghue has written *Fit for Mission? Church* to foster and promote an authentic and confident Catholic identity among the men, women and children of the 21st century, to enable them to resist the pressures to compromise, even abandon, the truths of the Catholic faith.

Nine months in preparation, *Fit for Mission? Church* presents Bishop Patrick's first considered response to the sixteenth month consultation process examining the sacramental and missionary life of all the 108 parishes of the Diocese of Lancaster.

In the same straight forward and honest style as his Vatican-acclaimed teaching document, *Fit for Mission? Schools*, his latest ongoing formation document highlights good things that are going on in the life of the Church, points out where things have gone wrong, and offers practical suggestions on how to uphold and strengthen our Catholic identity.

Bishop Patrick takes an unflinching look at the hard questions that have arisen since the close of the Second Vatican Council. One of the over-arching questions the Bishop raises is, 'Why has the post-conciliar period been a time of both faithful implementation and brazen dissent in the life of the Church; a time of confidence and communion, but also of confusion and discord?'

Fit for Mission? Church examines the correct interpretation of the Second Vatican Council through returning to the eye-witnesses of the Council as a way of counter-balancing a pervasive misreading of documents that fuels confusion and dissent.

The Bishop is convinced that many Catholics have forgotten that Pope John XXIII's intention in convening the Second Vatican Council was to renew the life of the Church through sensitively balancing change necessary to meet the pastoral needs of the modern world with the life-giving continuity of doctrinal, moral and liturgical truths.

Losing touch with the original intention behind the Second Vatican Council has resulted in many clergy and laity forgetting what it means to be Catholic. In the hard-hitting section, 'Have we forgotten what it is to be Catholic?', Bishop Patrick reminds his readers of the essential requirements to be an authentic, practicing Roman Catholic.

Furthermore, Bishop Patrick takes the four Constitutions of the Council as the structure to examine the life and mission of the Church today. They are the four keys to unlock the true understanding and implementation of the Council.

Here are some highlights from the document:

Key One: Liturgy

"Liturgy is not primarily about creating the experience of community, it should be about adoration of God. The Constitution on the liturgy envisaged the renewal of the liturgy as entailing careful changes that facilitated the active participation of the laity balanced with preserving what is essential to the tradition of the Church.

The Council Fathers never envisaged a totally vernacular liturgy, but quite specifically decided that the Mass should contain both Latin and the vernacular. However, much that the Council wanted to preserve has, until recently, been in danger of being forgotten. It is time that we remembered that we are part of the Latin-rite Catholic Church. This is our heritage, this is our culture." (pp 33-42)

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Key Two: Revelation

"The acceptance of the validity of modern methods of studying the Bible by the Church has undoubtedly enriched our knowledge of Scripture; but at the same time it has not been without risks of misuse by some theologians, casting shadows across the lives of the faithful through – among other things – irresponsible and inauthentic catechesis.

As your bishop, I am concerned that those in positions of responsibility pass on a full and complete exposition of Catholic doctrine. The *Constitution on Divine Revelation* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sets up a series of checks and balances that should be used by theologians in studying scripture and by the faithful to judge the authenticity of sensational claims and media-hyped speculations." (pp 43-54)

Key Three: The Church

"We have witnessed over the past forty years a growing crisis in the Catholic understanding or self-identity of the Church. This crisis about the identity of the Church is at the root of all the other crises that face us. Many no longer have a Catholic understanding of the Church, as a body willed by Christ. Many no longer consider the Catholic Church unique, but just view her as one church among many churches.

What needs to happen is for catechesis to take hold of the heart and imagination of thousands across the diocese. If people see catechesis as another word for attaining a deeper relationship, deeper personal knowledge, a deeper communion with Jesus, the passion, the fire would catch in many hearts. True catechesis is profoundly personal and transforming, through which the Church awakens in our souls!" (pp 55-64)

Key Four: The Church in the Modern World

"Loving our Neighbour has Political Implications. We can't call ourselves Catholic and then simply stand by while migrants get mistreated, or the poor get robbed, or unborn children get killed. The Catholic faith is always personal, but never private. If our faith is real, then it will bear fruit in our public decisions and behaviours, including our political choices. So can a Catholic in good conscience vote and campaign for a political candidate who supports and promotes abortion and/ or euthanasia or promotes a cut in international aid?

My personal answer to this question is: *I can't and I won't*. But I do know some serious Catholics – people whom I admire on a whole range of issues – who will vote and campaign for MPs who hold all kinds of positions that are against the teachings of the Church. I know that they do sincerely struggle with their party's position on, say, abortion or stem-cell research, and it causes them real pain. More importantly: *They don't keep quiet about it!* They re-double their efforts to bring about reform of their party's position." (pp 65-78)

Notes to Editors:

1. Bishop O'Donoghue has been a Bishop for 15 years and is due to retire as Bishop of Lancaster in May 2009.
2. *Fit for Mission? Church* is aimed principally at the priests, deacons, parish pastoral councillors, deanery pastoral councillors and other lay leaders of the Diocese of Lancaster.
3. *Fit for Mission? Church* is available for viewing from 27 August, 11am at: www.lancasterrcdioocese.org.uk
4. Bishop O'Donoghue is currently on holiday until 2 September 2008 when he will return to the Diocese and then be available for interviews.

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