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AN INVITATION FROM THE BISHOP TO PRAY FOR THE DIOCESE

When Pope Benedict announced a 'Year of Faith' in the Church beginning in October 2012, he did so in response to what he called **'a profound crisis of faith, a loss of the religious sense which represents one of the greatest challenges for the church today'**.

This crisis touches us all, all our parishes and indeed all our homes. Many people have given up the practice of the faith. We have all questioned or felt challenged in the matter of our Christian and Catholic beliefs or teachings. It has become fashionable to reject faith, and many declare themselves atheist as a badge of honour almost. Amongst younger people, church-going demands courage in face of peers and dominant cultural norms.

Early in 2013, some people in the diocese came together to talk about this situation. What can be done? We cherish our faith, the meaning it gives and the support it brings in facing life's challenges. The group wondered is there a plan or program we might devise to reveal anew the joy of believing in Jesus, of being his disciples, and of belonging to the church we hold dear?

The more these questions are examined, the more we find how lost we are. So it was soon realised that if we are to find ways to renew ourselves in the faith and to bring it to others, we need God's help. We can do nothing on our own. So why not enlist that help in prayer, prayer that is fervent, consistent, and from the heart, prayer that we may find the way and that the Holy Spirit enlighten us. **'Apart from me you can do nothing'**, (John 15:5) Jesus said, speaking of human fruitfulness.

That is how the idea of **praying for our diocese** was born. It is the essential first step.

A prayer was composed for the diocese, a prayer that expresses our faith and our hope, a prayer that we might be instruments of renewal and that the Holy Spirit would inspire us in the plans or programmes we might set in motion during this year. And all of this for the sake of awakening in the people of our diocese a new sense of the gift and grace that is our faith in Jesus and our belonging to his Church.

My invitation today, then, is to pray this prayer for all the people of our parishes and diocese; to pray it every day; to pray it alone or with others; to pray it slowly, mindfully and with absolute trust.

And as we pray during all of this year, I invite all our Pastoral Councils and other parish and diocesan groups to reflect on what God is asking of us at this time: what is the Holy Spirit saying to the church in our parish and diocese, and how can we respond to that call; what can we do to bring new life to the faith and its practice? And let us do this in prayer, with trust in God and without hurry.

This is my invitation to all, young and old, men and women, at the beginning of this New Year. Praying together, God *will* show us the way.

And may his blessing be on us all this New Year.

'Where two or three gather in my name, there am I in the midst of them' Mt 18:20

+Brendan Kelly
Bishop of Achonry
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