



CLOSER TO CHRIST CAMPAIGN ANNOUNCEMENT LETTER - ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH, ANDOVER

Dear Parishioners of St. John the Baptist,

I am sure you will agree when I say this last year has continued to be challenging. Yet although many aspects of our lives have been impacted, our Catholic faith has remained the one constant. I am encouraged by those returning to Mass, the large numbers who have joined livestream liturgies, parishioners supporting neighbours, friends and loved ones. I also wish to thank wholeheartedly those clergy who have worked so tirelessly to sustain and support the communities under their care. It is this steadfast commitment that has progressed the Church across the Diocese of Portsmouth since the late 19th century.

As a faith community, we have been through some challenging times in the past yet by God's grace, we have always shown resilience, compassion and generosity. Fifteen years ago, the Living Our Faith campaign had a tremendous and wide-reaching effect, and I am grateful for all it enabled. I am confident now with the intercession of St. John the Baptist and our patron, St. Edmund of Abingdon, that we have the strength to continue our great mission of 'Bringing people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church'.

Further to much prayer, consideration and consultation with clergy and laity, we have embarked on a new fundraising initiative entitled the **Closer to Christ** Campaign. This will build upon the mission of our church, enabling us to continue our journey to become ever more outward facing and evangelistic, while meeting the immediate financial priorities of parishes, who are the backbone of our Church.

Central to the success of our mission, is the continued support of our clergy at all stages of ministry, those individuals who give their lives to serve our parish communities. **Closer to Christ** will fund our seminarians and priests in active ministry and rejuvenate our parishes, ensuring they have the necessary resources to provide a place for prayer, worship and community interaction, meeting a broad range of faith needs and giving them a platform to thrive. We must also care for our priests in their retirement, recognising the important work they have achieved in delivering our mission and the contribution they continue to make in so many ways following a life of service and dedication to local parish life.

The **Closer to Christ** Campaign is a 'call to action' which invites parishioners to become more fully and sacrificially involved in the life of the Church – to collectively build God's Kingdom and live the Gospel, especially in providing for others. Simultaneously, the **Closer to Christ** Campaign reflects a commitment to enhanced communications and stewardship of donors' generosity. Over the next two years, every parish will participate in this endeavour. Last year we began the Campaign in four pilot parishes and I am delighted that St John the Baptist, Andover will be part of the next group of parishes leading the way.

In the coming months, Fr. Austin will be sharing with you in more detail the objectives of this initiative – through individual conversations, telephone/video calls and announcements at Mass. I appreciate your willingness to learn more, ask questions, consider the role you could play and importantly pray for our success.

Towards the end of his Letter to the Philippians, St. Paul says: "There is no need to worry, but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving" (Phil 4: 6). I look forward to us all accomplishing together the Lord's work, moving from maintenance to mission.

In Corde Iesu

+Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth