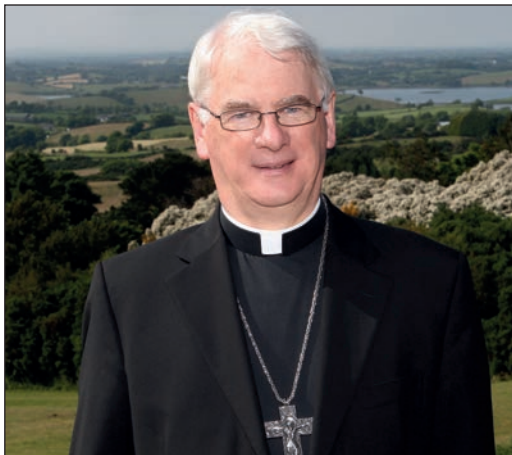


POPE FRANCIS ANNOUNCES AN
EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE YEAR:
A YEAR OF MERCY



8TH DECEMBER 2015 – 20TH NOVEMBER 2016

A MESSAGE FROM + NOEL TREANOR BISHOP OF DOWN AND CONNOR



THIS MESSAGE IS ALSO AVAILABLE IN VIDEO
FORMAT AT WWW.DOWNANDCONNOR.ORG
CLICK ON THE YEAR OF MERCY ICON



Why has Pope Francis announced a Year of Mercy?

Pope Francis writes: *“I present...this Extraordinary Jubilee Year dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us.”* (M.V. 25) He believes that ‘Mercy’ is at the very heart of Christian faith and encourages us to make ‘Mercy’ the cornerstone of the life and mission of the Church.



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Throughout his life, Pope Francis has laboured to bring Jesus’ healing and transforming love into the lives of the broken, the poor and the sinner. Drawing from his own pastoral experience, he recognises that our brokenness often traps us in selfishness and sin, placing us in *“existential and moral dilemmas”*. We all, from time to time, can make bad decisions or choose to do something we know to be wrong. This can happen because of pressures exerted by particular circumstances. Having made such choices we later regret them but become trapped by a spiral of shame and guilt. Only God’s mercy can free us from this trap of shame and guilt. Pope Francis urges us to fix our eyes *“on Jesus and his merciful gaze”* (M.V. 8) so that through him we can return to the ‘Merciful Father’ who awaits us. *“Jesus is the face of the Father’s mercy.”* (M.V. 1)

Pope Francis calls us to open *“our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness”* (M.V. 2) ‘Mercy’ gives us the courage to repent and empowers us to change our lives. *“We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity and peace. Our salvation depends on it.”* (M.V. 2) By announcing this Year of Mercy, the Pope, by word and deed, seeks to convince us of the necessity of mercy and challenges us to become merciful so that we may be saved by ‘Mercy’.

What does Pope Francis invite us to THINK about in this Holy Year?

First of all, Pope Francis invites us think about the mercy of God offered to all humanity. Our God is a merciful God. God reveals his mercy as that of a loving father or mother, *"...moved to the very depths out of love for their child."* (M.V. 6) Again and again the Old Testament underscores the patience and mercy of God. Psalm 136 echoes with the chorus "for his mercy endures forever". In the pages of the New Testament people experience the mercy of God, in person, through the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. Consider those startling words of Jesus uttered from the depths of his pain and rejection on the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). As Pope Francis puts it, *"When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy"* (M.V. 3)

Secondly, once we have experienced this mercy which *"consoles, pardons and instills hope"* (M.V. 3), Pope Francis says that we can become the messengers of this mercy to others. He writes: *"How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst."* (M.V.5)

The icon chosen for this year invites us to become MERCIFUL LIKE THE FATHER; a shortened version of Luke 6:36, "Be merciful just as you Father is merciful."



A 'reading' of the icon can be found at the end of this booklet

How does Pope Francis invite us to PRAY in this Holy Year?

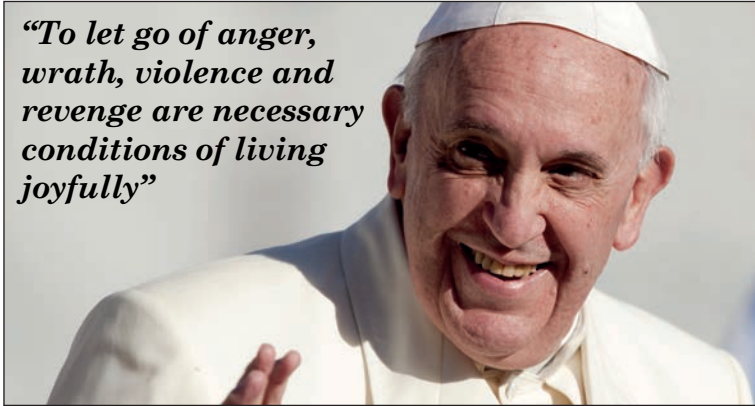
Pope Francis invites us to rediscover the central place of the Word of God in our prayer and in our lives. He urges us to rediscover the value of silence in order that the Word of God can speak to us, live in us and thus transform us. The Pope highlights a number of parables from the Gospels that we might use to meditate upon and pray with throughout the year:

- 1 the parables devoted to the joy of finding what was lost (Lk 15:1-32): the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son (the prodigal son). The joy of finding the lost sheep and the lost coin are images of the joy of welcoming home the prodigal son, who “was dead and has come to life; was lost and is found” (Lk 15:32).
- 2 the parable of the unforgiving debtor. In this parable Jesus warns about a lack of mercy and a coldness of heart that cut us off from salvation (Mt 18:23-35). Even though his master cancelled his debts, the unforgiving debtor refused to cancel his fellow servant’s debts. How did his heart become so hardened?
- 3 the great parable of Judgment: the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:31-46). In this parable Jesus teaches that the mercy we show in this life is intimately bound up with the mercy we will find in the next life. The parable warns us that neglect of the poor, the sick or the stranger is a neglect of our own spiritual well-being.

During this year Pope Francis invites us to discern that showing mercy to others not only has a positive effect on them, it also has a formative effect on us. By showing mercy we grow in mercy: *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7, M.V. 9)*. Without mercy our hearts harden, and the ‘weeds of bitterness’ choke the ‘shoots of joy’ in our lives (Mt 13:25-30).

Being merciful to others, especially those who have hurt us, can be difficult. The Pope knows, from personal experience, how it feels to be treated harshly and unjustly by others – even by those in the Church. However he reassures us that being merciful is the better path to follow. He writes, *“At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence and revenge are necessary conditions of living joyfully. Let us therefore heed [St Paul’s] exhortation: ‘Do not let the sun go down on your anger’ (Eph. 4:26). Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith.” (M.V. 9)*

***“To let go of anger,
wrath, violence and
revenge are necessary
conditions of living
joyfully”***



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How does Pope Francis invite us to ACT in this Holy Year?

Pope Francis says that during this year it is *“his burning desire”* (M.V.15) that Christian people rediscover *“the corporal and the spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty.”* (M.V.15) For centuries Christian people have shown mercy in two ways; by attending to people’s physical and emotional needs, and by offering moral and spiritual guidance. Because the number 7 has a special religious significance, the Church set down seven key duties in relation to each.

The seven corporal (or practical) works of mercy:

Feed the hungry
Give drink to the thirsty
Clothe the naked
Welcome the stranger
Heal the sick
Visit the imprisoned
Bury the dead.

The seven spiritual works of mercy:

Counsel the doubtful
Instruct the ignorant
Admonish the sinner
Comfort the afflicted
Forgive offences
Bear patiently those who do us ill
Pray for the living and the dead.

“Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope”



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‘Mercy’ is not just a concept to be thought about and prayed over, it is a *gift* from God that must be lived. By showing mercy to others, we are witnessing to our faith in God. “It is by my deeds that I will show you my faith” (James 2:18). Christians are called to pray in their homes, worship in their churches *and* serve the needs of their ‘neighbours’ in the world, both their physical and spiritual needs. ‘Mercy’ is a force that can change our lives and our world. The Pope points out that *“without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if [living] in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.”* (M.V. 10)

Our Diocesan Programme for the Year of Mercy

A. The Door of Mercy

On 8th December 2015 Pope Francis will open the Holy Door, *the Door of Mercy*, in St Peter's Basilica, Rome, inaugurating the Year of Mercy. The following Sunday 13th December he will announce that a *Door of Mercy* will be opened in each diocese throughout the world, at a church of special significance. As this is its bicentenary year, 1815-2015, I have chosen St Patrick's Church, Donegall Street, Belfast, as the Church to host the Door of Mercy for the Diocese. I will open the Door on Sunday 13th December at the 7pm mass, asking God's mercy upon all who pass through it. It is my hope that many people from parishes throughout the diocese will join the parishioners of St Patrick's for that occasion.

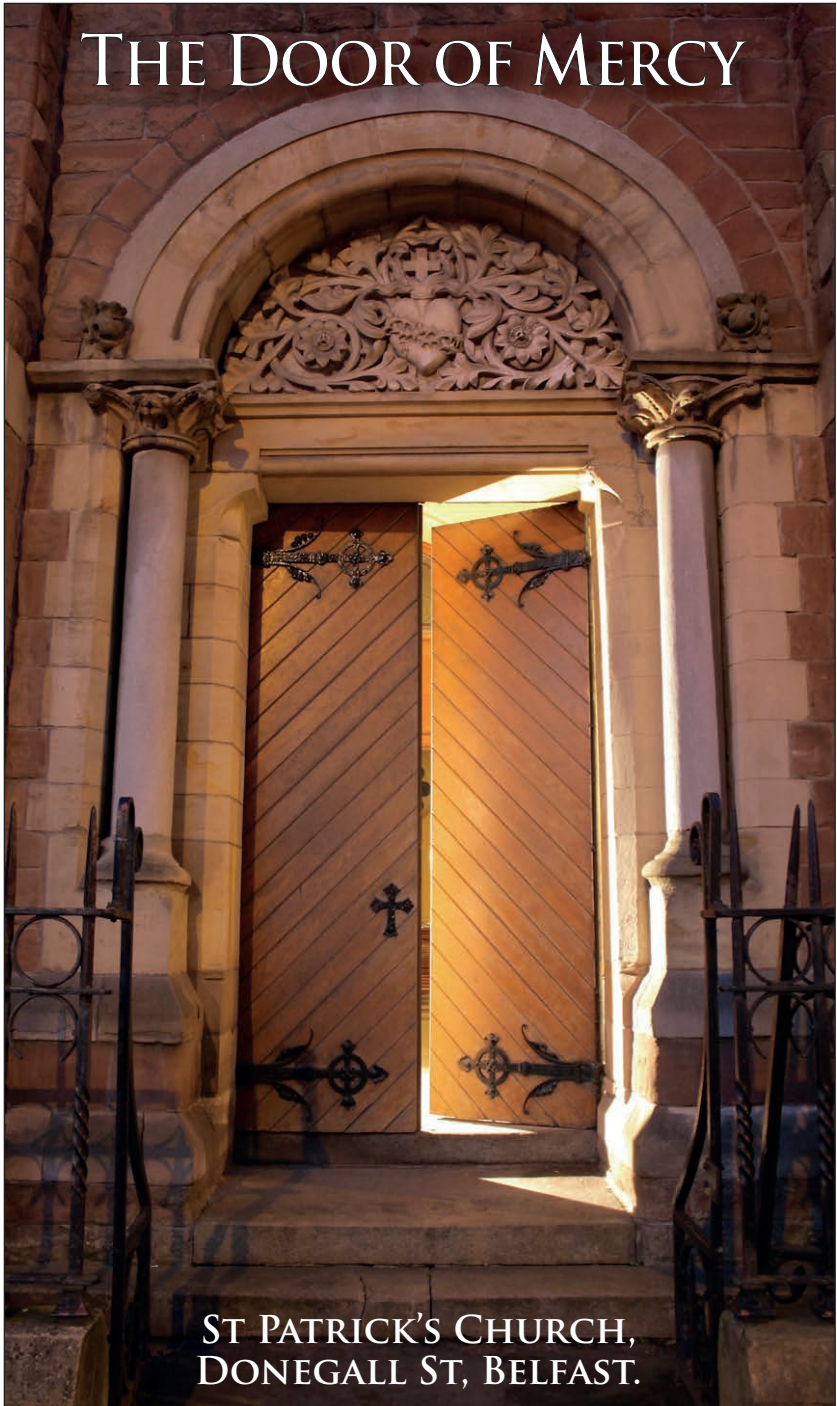
Pope Francis has suggested that a similar door may be opened at a shrine frequented by large groups of people. I have agreed that Clonard Monastery, Belfast, should open a Holy Door to mark the 150th anniversary of devotion to the icon of the Mother of Perpetual Help. This will be an important part of Clonard's celebrations leading to the Solemn Novena in June 2016.

The opening of these doors will symbolise Jesus opening his arms on the cross with mercy for all mankind. Pilgrims will then be invited to visit St Patrick's Church, Belfast, at their own convenience during the Holy Year, and enter through the Door of Mercy as a sign of true conversion and closeness to the Father. For those unable to go on pilgrimage physically to the Door of Mercy (i.e. the housebound and those imprisoned, whom Pope Francis specially remembers in his letter) a 'virtual online pilgrimage' will be available via the Diocesan website. Go to www.downandconnor.org and click on the icon for the Year of Mercy. Pope Francis' prayer is that all who make this pilgrimage, in whatever form, will "*experience the love of God who consoles, pardons and instils hope.*"(M.V.3) This grace of entering through the Door of Mercy (called the 'indulgence'), is granted when this outward devotion is completed prayerfully with a sincere interior disposition.

B. The Day of Mercy.

In the New Year 2016, I invite everyone in the Diocese to observe a special 'Day of Mercy' on the last Friday of every month beginning on Friday 29th January and concluding on 28th October 2016. This should be a day of prayer, fasting and almsgiving; a day when we remember God's mercy for us and share that mercy with others. This simple idea will give a structure, a unity and flexibility to our celebrations.

THE DOOR OF MERCY



ST PATRICK'S CHURCH,
DONEGALL ST, BELFAST.

The 'Day of Mercy' can be observed in various ways.

- 1 Individuals, families and parish groups can mark this day in a traditional way or they may wish to think of something new and imaginative e.g. fasting from food, sweet things and alcohol is traditional, but perhaps you could consider 'fasting' from television or computer games and '*do-something-more-merciful-instead*'!
- 2 Parishes could get together in their Pastoral Communities to plan for one monthly prayer service for the pastoral community and could be creative in addressing some joint practical work of mercy.
- 3 Diocesan organisations, which might want to plan a one-off event for the Year of Mercy, could plan that event for one of the Days of Mercy - if that is practical.

As a guide, a small booklet will be available in all parishes in January containing prayers and suggestions for each 'Day of Mercy'. Also, everyone could subscribe to 'Thought for the Month', a monthly message from Pope Francis which will be automatically sent to your smart-phone, tablet or computer on the 'Day of Mercy'. Go to the Diocesan Website www.downandconnor.org, click on the Year of Mercy icon and under 'Thought for the Month' enter your email address.



'Missionaries of Mercy' (as Pope Francis calls them) will be available, during a special time of prayer, for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in St Patrick's Church, Belfast, on the Days of Mercy, as listed below. These **'Missionaries of Mercy'** will be chosen from priests working in our Diocese and will be commissioned by Pope Francis on Ash Wednesday to be compassionate confessors who will emphasise the Father's welcome.



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The 'Missionaries of Mercy' will celebrate God's gift of mercy with those whose lives are most broken by shame, guilt and sin. I can assure you that whoever deeply desires the Sacrament of Reconciliation but, because of fear or shame, has hesitated to approach the sacrament will be especially welcomed. Pope Francis says, "*Mercy will always be greater than any sin.*" (M.V.3)

The '*Missionaries of Mercy*' will be available in St Patrick's Church, Belfast, on

	26 th	February 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm
(Good Friday)	25 th	March 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm
	29 th	April 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm
	27 th	May 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm
	24 th	June 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm
	29 th	July 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm
	26 th	August 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm
	29 th	September 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm
	28 th	October 2016	7.00 – 8.00pm



“24 Hours for the Lord”, a time of prayer and reconciliation for everyone and which Pope Francis has introduced in Rome during Lent, will be celebrated in three centres in the Diocese, Belfast, Ballymena and Downpatrick, from Friday evening 4th March 2016 to Saturday evening 5th March 2016. More details about that will be given nearer the time.

A Concluding Thought

While planning and creativity on our part will be important in celebrating this Year of Mercy, let us not forget that God will have a plan for each of us in the coming year. What God does for us - and in and through us – is more important than the goals and achievements that we set ourselves. In this coming year let us commit ourselves to merciful attitudes and actions so that lives may be touched and souls may be healed by God’s mercy working through us. We should never underestimate how our Christian living and example may strengthen someone else’s faith or lead another to ‘conversion of heart’.

Let us be attentive in prayer; let us be generous of heart; may God surprise us, challenge us and heal us in this Year of Mercy.

*“This is the opportune moment to change our lives!
This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched!
God never tires of reaching out to us.” (M.V. 19)*

+ Noel Treanor

Appendix A



An explanation of the Year of Mercy logo

The logo was designed by Fr. Marko Rupnik, a Jesuit priest. In this logo he seeks to encapsulate the theme of mercy. It is a modern-looking image executed in a traditional style. It calls to mind the image of the Good Shepherd seeking and finding the lost sheep (Lk 15:1-7) and also the story of the Good Samaritan: “He lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him.” (Lk 10:29-37) The logo represents the Risen Christ, Son of the Merciful Father, marked by the ‘wounds of love’ evident on his hands and feet, carrying Adam on his shoulders to salvation. Adam represents humanity.

We cannot earn salvation because none of us are without sin (1 Jn 1:8-10). So Jesus comes to pick us up, dust us off, raise us up and carry the burden of our guilt and shame for us. Jesus, who is mercy itself, carries Adam from a dark blue background to progressively lighter blue foregrounds – Jesus leads humanity from darkness to the light. The two black beams that Jesus walks on, suggesting the beams of the cross, have now become the way of the cross - the path to salvation.

The two figures at times seem to fuse, obviously so in the merging of the eyes. This feature is significant as it symbolises the incarnation: Jesus shares in our humanity so that we can more clearly see the Merciful Father through his eyes, and one day gaze with Jesus - “through him, with him and in him” – upon the Face of the Father for all eternity.

Fr. Marko expresses it in this way:

One particular feature worthy of note is... [Jesus’] eyes are merged with those of man [Adam]. Christ sees with the eyes of Adam, and Adam with the eyes of Christ. Every person discovers in Christ, the new Adam, one’s own humanity and the future that lies ahead, contemplating, in his gaze, the love of the Father.

