

POPE FRANCIS ANNOUNCES **A YEAR OF MERCY**



8th December 2015 to
20th November 2016

The Programme for the Year of Mercy
for the Diocese of Down & Connor

(Executive Summary)

A. The Door of Mercy

On 8th December 2015 Pope Francis will open the Door of Mercy, in St Peter's Basilica, Rome, inaugurating the Year of Mercy. The following Sunday 13th December I will open a Door of Mercy for the Diocese in St Patrick's Church, Donegall Street, Belfast at the 7.00pm mass. St Patrick's Parish celebrates its bicentenary year, 1815-2015. It is my hope that many people from the diocese will join the parishioners of St Patrick's for that occasion.

I have agreed that Clonard Monastery, Belfast, should also 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 in 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 actually go on pilgrimage to the Door of Mercy (i.e. the housebound and those imprisoned, who 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.*"

A. 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.

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

- a. Individuals, families and parish groups can mark this day in a traditional way or they may 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*'.
- b. 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.
- c. Diocesan organisations, who 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, go to 'Thought for the Month' and enter your email address.

'**Missionaries of Mercy**' (as Pope Francis calls them) will be available, on the 'Day of Mercy', for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in St Patrick's Church, Belfast, as listed overleaf. 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.

They 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 welcome. Pope Francis says, *“Mercy will always be greater than any sin.”*

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

Pope Francis urges us to believe, *“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”*.

My prayer for this Holy Year is that the message of mercy may reach everyone. May no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy, to be committed to mercy, so that we all, may be saved by mercy.

+ Noel Treanor

The full text of Bishop Noel Treanor’s pastoral letter on the Year of Mercy and a video presentation of the message are available at the Diocesan website

www.downandconnor.org

Click on the Year of Mercy icon.