

REPORT FOR PORTSMOUTH PEOPLE

In an inspiring and relaxed homily Bishop Crispian Hollis told 630 parishioners and guests at the dedication of Portsmouth Diocese's newest church that their £3.2m home must be "an open house."

After dedicating the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and St, Peter the Apostle at London Road, Waterlooville on July 1 Bishop Crispian said that the beautiful church was more than just a building.

"Medieval churches tell a story of faith and that's what I want to happen to this building", he said.

"It is not to be narrowly Catholic. We don't live in a ghetto. We have a part to play in the community and your doors must always be open to anybody. This is a house of welcome because it is a house of prayer where differences and divisions can be reconciled."

The church, designed by Christchurch based architect Columba Cook is an eye-catching modern building, with exciting use of glass in the stunning teardrop sanctuary window, a bold tower and an eco-friendly rainwater harvesting system and solar panels which earn cash from surplus power. There is a stunning oak-beamed ceiling over the open-plan assembly space and beyond the narthex, a multi-purpose parish centre.

Laughter erupted when the bishop recalled telling the Pope the name of the new church when they met in Rome. "The Pope said it was a very Catholic title and I said that actually we ARE Catholics in the Diocese of Portsmouth."

It had taken some 40 years of patience, hard work and unremitting prayer to get the project launched after it had been a "twinkle in the eye" of successive parish priests like Fathers Tom McGrath, David Sillence and the present incumbent Kevin Bidgood - who assisted in the concelebrated mass.

It was, the result, too, of "a stupendous amount of hard work, skill and artistry" in which the architect excelled. There was recognition, too, amid sustained applause, for Philip Hayllar, for ten years the chairman of the building committee, who received a Bene Merenti medal and citation from the bishop. Mr Hayllar said the medal should go to the whole parish for its wisdom in choosing a committee which had stuck together in a surprising way.

Father Bidgood praised the builders for their skill and endurance and asked their Managing Director, Phil Wilding, to thank his staff "from the bottom of our hearts".

Bishop Crispian was supported by more than 20 clergy led by Bishop Peter Doyle, former priest in Portsmouth and now Bishop of Northampton. Guests included Mark Radcliffe, the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, George Hollingbery, M.P. for the Meon Valley, and Cllr. Ken Smith and Mrs Hazel Smith, the Mayor and Mayoress of Havant.