

EPSOM DEANERY NEWSLETTER

Issue #5 – January 2026

Welcome to the latest *Deanery Newsletter...*



Our Pastoral Plan: what happens next?

Firstly, a huge thank you to the many parishioners who took the time and trouble, during the busy run-up to Christmas, to share their thoughts and ideas using the *You're Invited!* postcards, or the on-line form, or by e-mail. When we launched this, we had no idea what level of response we would get: more than three hundred comments or questions were submitted, including over one hundred and thirty opportunities. It is very heartening to read the many thoughtful suggestions of what we might explore together so that, as a true 'community of communities', we can all better fulfil our part in bringing the Good News of salvation to everyone.



But before we go on, we must pause and reflect on what has changed for us.

Some things will not happen as planned

The announcement, just before Christmas, that Bishop Richard is to be installed as the next Archbishop of Westminster in February, has some immediate implications for the work we and other deaneries in Arundel & Brighton have been doing as part of our Pastoral Plan.

Under the Canon Law of the Church, Bishop Richard is now temporary Administrator of the Diocese and may not take any action that would bind or limit his successor. When Bishop Richard is installed in Westminster on 14 February, the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton will become "vacant" (known in Latin as "*Sede Vacante*") and an Administrator will be appointed to serve until such time as we receive a new Bishop; this Administrator is likewise not permitted to take actions that bind or limit an incoming Bishop.

What does the restriction on actions that 'would bind or limit' mean in practice? Amongst other things, neither Bishop Richard nor the new Administrator has the authority to make the structural changes to parishes envisaged in the Pastoral Plan; for us in Epsom Deanery, this means that the plan to bring together our nine constituent parishes into a new Single Parish cannot go ahead at this time.

At this stage, therefore, we cannot plan for changes to our parish structure. Also, we cannot be sure how long it will be before a new bishop is appointed; and we cannot anticipate the extent to which our next bishop will wish to take time to familiarise himself with the diocese, the clergy and the people of God for whom he will be responsible – nor whether he will then want to follow a path of fresh consultation before reaching any decisions on his own plan for Arundel & Brighton.

As a result of these uncertainties, we decided not to go ahead with the planned Parishioner Events that we had advertised in each of our constituent parishes in January and early February. Although the focus of our reflections was to be the mission to which we are all called, the timing of these events was largely driven by the expected timescale for the structural change which is now suspended. Looking at the questions and concerns raised by parishioners, many were about the day-to-day implications of that structural change and will be addressed at a later date if and when such change is to go ahead; other points can be addressed within the communities affected.

So does that mean we are just going to lapse back into 'business as usual' and wait – as long as it takes – until a new bishop tells us what to do next? **Absolutely not!** Our Parish Leadership Team, comprising clergy and lay volunteers from across our constituent parishes, does not think that is what the Church expects of us and does not think it is what you, our parishioners, expect us to do with the ideas you have contributed.

Our Mission goes on!

The Word Who is Life has always been about much more than the re-organisation of parishes: the **Call to Mission** of the Plan is an invitation to everyone to respond to their Baptismal calling and take an active role in the Church's Mission. Across the Deanery we have many examples of people generously doing this within their communities and beyond, and we should celebrate that commitment. This richness of service and commitment makes clear why the key elements of the Pastoral Plan remain valid for us all, irrespective of whether parish structures change, and these are things that we can and will pursue, both within our existing parishes and working with each other when we see opportunities to '**do better together**':

- a renewed commitment to **Prayer**, especially the way in which we celebrate that most important prayer, the Mass;
- embracing the 'right and responsibility' of *every person in the Diocese* 'to grow in the knowledge and understanding of the faith' through **Formation**;
- harnessing individual and collective commitment to a reinvigoration of our communities in support of the **Mission** of the Church.

So what are we going to do? Whilst the planned events are no longer going to happen in the next few weeks, we are planning opportunities for everyone to get involved over the coming months. Specifically:

- Suggestions for local initiatives (such as, "please can we have a Children's Liturgy on Sunday mornings in my church") can be considered locally and taken forward as each community sees fit: to facilitate this, such contributions which identified a 'home' parish will be shared anonymously with the clergy and local leadership teams of that community;
- As we approach the season of Lent, we will be looking at opportunities to co-ordinate chances to pray together, or reflect on our faith together, across our different communities;
- After Easter, we are planning a celebration for all those who volunteer across our communities, both as a thankyou and as a way to build mutual support;
- The Parish Leadership Team will be working through **all** the postcard, on-line and e-mail contributions, looking particularly at suggested opportunities where it may be easier for two or more of our communities to work together to start, or improve, what we are doing and the next Deanery Newsletter, at the start of Lent, will include their initial proposals for that further work.

Please pray for our diocese

I know that some people will be frustrated that a growing momentum and appetite for change across our communities needs to be paused at this stage, particularly when we cannot know how long the pause will last, or whether the strategy might be different afterwards. On the other hand, we can embrace this pause as a chance to pray again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for the help of Mary, Mother of God, co-patron of our Diocese, in building our part of the Church into a true community of communities.

As Bishop Richard said at the end of his Pastoral Plan webinar in early 2024, "*Just envisage for a moment ... this mission the Lord has given to us carried out in every home, in every house, in every school, in every parish community, in every mind and in every heart: could we really, with the Lord's help, come to that place? Just think, what a wonderful Diocesan family we can be. We're amazing already, but there is always so much more that we can do on this great journey.*"

And please pray for Archbishop-Elect Richard Moth as he prepares to take up his new post at Westminster.
With every blessing for 2026.

Fr Chris Bergin