



# **Leicester Deanery Roadshow**

Saint Theresa's parish church, Birstall, Leicester

Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022

7.00pm

Monsignor John Hadley opened the evening, welcoming all present, and especially those who would lead the sessions. He then led those gathered in the Prayer for the Synod.

Sister Mary Deane, from Sherwood Deanery, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and then outlined the purposes of the evening:

- Explanation – difficult decisions have been made, different avenues have been explored;
- Exploration – these explanations have been given – how can we make these work?
- Expectation – what will happen next, how will we make this happen, what are the next steps?

Sister Mary also indicated that although questions raised might not be answered tonight, everything raised would be recorded, and time would be given after the formal part of the evening for individual questions to be raised.

Bishop Patrick then outlined the current situation in our diocese with reference to statistics:

- In 1985
  - Mass attendance in our diocese was 50,391;
  - we had 145 active priests;
  - we had 158 Churches in which Sunday Mass was celebrated;
  - we had 24 students for the priesthood in major seminary, 2 in pre-seminary and 8 in Junior Seminary.
- In 2015
  - Mass attendance was 29,848 (a reduction of 41%);
  - we had 92 active priests (a reduction of 37%);
  - we had 156 Churches in which Sunday Mass was celebrated (a reduction of just 1%);
  - we had 8 students in major seminary, 1 in pre-seminary, and 13 training for the Permanent Diaconate which has proved to be a very helpful ministry across the diocese.

So over that period of 30 years this diocese experienced an average 39% reduction in both priests and parishioners; but only a 1% reduction in the number of churches. That's the position, pre-covid. Let's now take a look statistically at the impact covid has had on our diocese.

- In 2021
  - Mass attendance last October was 17,468 (a reduction of 65% since 1985);
  - we had 85 active priests (a reduction of 41% from 1985);
  - we had 140 Churches in which Sunday Mass was celebrated (a reduction of 11% since 1985);
  - we had 1 student in major seminary, 1 in pre-seminary (a reduction of 94% since 1985);
  - and 3 training for the Permanent Diaconate (a reduction of 77% since 2015).

The covid pandemic has fast-forwarded the decline in our diocesan statistics, but the number of churches hasn't declined in the way the numbers of parishioners and priests have. We can't continue in this vein of having so many buildings which are used for only a short period of time each week. In some cases we'll have to take the painful decision to close some churches, and we are all, bishop and people, aware of the pain of these decisions. What we keep has to best serve Christ's mission in our diocese. We are all part of Christ's Church, and Christ will always lead us forward. For our part we must continue our reorganisation of deaneries, to be better equipped in Christ's mission. After a two-year covid period we now have to move forward again.

The average age of priests in our diocese is 63 years. Priests are feeling the increasing administrative burden, which doesn't present a good picture for the future. A clear roadmap has been asked for, and one which shows us all the way forward, giving a way forward in co-responsibility between clergy and laity.

There are green shoots, such as young men expressing a desire to consider priesthood, but this can take a couple of years of discernment, and then some (maybe seven) years in formation. Our schools have 30,000 pupils and students in them, embracing the three pastoral themes in the diocese: encounter, discipleship, and missionary discipleship. Young people, helped by the growing number of chapels and lay chaplains in our schools, need to be channelled into the future of our Church.

The laity in our diocese have many gifts and talents, but these aren't always brought into the best service for Christ's mission. The curia is working to assist the laity, as are the worldwide organisation Divine Renovation, transforming from maintenance to mission mode. This helps us to embrace the three pastoral priorities in our diocese: to help children and young people to encounter God's love and to become active disciples of Christ Jesus in the life and mission of the Church; to offer support and formation to parishioners to enable them to be confident agents of missionary discipleship, both within their parish and wider society; and thirdly, ongoing support for our clergy to free them up to be pastors, leaders and enablers of mission.

Will this discussion tonight lead to anything? Yes. There is a pledge tonight to make decisions which will help to make disciples in the Church of the future. It won't be easy, but we can all help to transform our diocese.

#### **Feedback from the pews**

- Is there a need for healing within the Church before we can move forward as a Church?
- Formation for children and our families is important.
- There is a sense of hope in what's being heard tonight.
- The encounter with Jesus, of the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in our schools, is a powerful witness.
- There is a tension between the buildings, and the importance of the people who make the Church. The 'big' word here is co-responsibility.

Canon Joe Wheat, Vicar General, outlined the process so far, talking back to the Diocesan Assembly in 2003, and You Are Living Stones from 2011. In this deanery work has already been done in bringing some parishes together into new groupings. There is a desire to create outward looking communities, to reorient the expectation that there is a way of working which allows us all to be more missionary, rather than simply maintaining what we have at the moment. The average age of clergy is going up, and there is a need to consider how the resources can best be used. Are there more imaginative ways in which some of our buildings can be used more helpfully for the local community? Can we be better placed to engage with society? Can we utilise our outreach more effectively? Can the schools be more involved in the local Catholic life? How far can there be a growth in lay-leadership?

Canon Eddy Jarosz, Vicar General, outlined the new groupings for the deanery, noting that some of the clustering has already happened in this deanery, although there are still separate parishes within the deanery, and so separate pastoral council, bank accounts, etc. These new clusters will also have responsibility to work with existing areas of pastoral care and mission. How can the funds released from the buildings

which are being disposed of be best used for mission? What other elements should be taken into consideration? The clusters will be:

Parish	Priests (now / future)	Deacons	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
Holy Cross, Leicester	3 / 3 (Religious)		Holy Cross	
Immaculate Conception, Oadby Saint Edward the Confessor, Aylestone Road Saint Mary, South Wigston, with Saint John Bosco, Eyres Monsall Saint Thomas More, Knighton Road	2 / 2	Vincent Kelly	St John Fisher St Thomas More	
Most Blessed Sacrament, Gooding Avenue Mother of God, New Parks Saint Peter, Hinckley Road	2 / 2	Joseph Sebastian	Christ the King	
Our Lady of Victories, Market Harborough	1 / 1		St Joseph	
Our Lady of Victories and Saint Alphonsus, Lutterworth Saint Pius X, Narborough	1 / 1	Kevin O'Connor		
Sacred Heart and Saint Margaret Mary, Mere Road Our Lady of Good Counsel, Rushey Mead Saint Joseph, Uppingham Road	4 / 2	Bill Myers Seamus O'Looskan	Sacred Heart St Joseph	St Paul
Saint Peter, Hinckley Saints Peter and Paul, Earl Shilton, with Our Lady and Saint Gregory, Market Bosworth	1 / 1	Thomas Berrie	St Peter, Earl Shilton St Peter, Hinckley	St Martin
Divine Infant of Prague, Syston Saint Theresa, Birstall, with Sacred Heart, Rothley Saint Patrick, Beaumont Leys Lane	3 / 1 (Religious?)		Bishop Ellis St Patrick	English Martyrs

### Other Places of Worship

- Conversion of Saint Paul, Leicester (with a resident Polish priest)
- Ascension of the Lord, Leicester (Ukrainian *sui iuris* Church)

### Religious Communities

- Institute of Charity, Ratcliffe (2 houses)
- Dominican (Santa Caterina), Leicester
- Dominican Sisters, Braunstone
- Presentation Sisters, Market Harborough
- Sisters of Providence, Eyres Monsell
- Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peace, Oadby
- Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peace, Scraptoft (2 houses)
- Consecrated Virgin, Leicester

## Chaplaincies

- HMP Leicester
- HMP Gartree, Market Harborough
- De Montford University
- University of Leicester
- Glenfield Hospital
- Hinckley Hospital
- Leicester General Hospital
- Leicester Royal Infirmary
- LOROS, Leicester
- Market Harborough General Hospital
- St Luke's Hospital, Market Harborough
- Sunnyside Hospital, Hinckley

## Closures

- The Rosary church, Netherhall (already closed)
- Woodhouse (cease to be used as a Mass centre)



## Feedback from the pews

- A list of what is required of a parish might be useful to have.
- The priest shouldn't be expected to do everything – the laity can (should?) be empowered to do things to.
- Sacramental life is important.
- There is a worry for the young, growing up with less 'religion' – can they be 'called' at a certain age, and 'set on fire'?
- There is a lot which can be done together (in clusters), but it's important not to lose a sense of identity of each individual community.
- Much can be learned from the Methodist Church, and the Catholic Church in France and Belgium.
- The main thing is fear – what is going to happen, which churches will be closed, which Masses will be lost? Addressing these fears is important, to avoid paralysis.
- A parish handbook would be good, to know who does what.
- A parish committee would likewise be helpful, to work together.
- A project in one parish can be a catalyst to allow other parishes / communities to join in.
- How can the Syro-Malabar Community be integrated into the cluster in which it might fit?
- Inspiration and advice is needed, especially to build up relationships: we are all in this together.
- Improving communications between the parishes (in a cluster), such as a joint pastoral council, would be good.
- A joint 'spirit, mission, service' group can be advantageous, and a way of capturing some of the green shoots which are emerging (and from the schools).
- A practical suggestion would be to reorganise Mass times, allowing the priest to celebrate in other places on a Sunday if needed.
- Ore involvement with Churches Together would be profitable.
- There is a lot of rebuilding needed after the covid pandemic.
- This is taking place in the light of the current Synodal process.

Canon Paul Chipchase, Episcopal Vicar for Finance and Administration, explained the role of the diocesan curia, a full range of skills and expertise to support mission in our diocese, through parishes, school, and other communities. The curia, from the Latin, 'cares' for people, for business situations, for agencies in the diocese, etc. The curia's aim is to take burdens off people in the parishes, especially where these don't need to be undertaken by those currently so doing: for example, assisting with financial issues, or building matters. We live in a world which is very much more regulated than in the past, and expertise is not always available at the local level, but can be provided by the curia. Sometimes there's a direct mission input, sometimes it's working through those who are in the parishes, schools and communities.

The key focus is to assist mission but with an eye to compliance, and ensuring everything is legal. A new booklet, 'Meet the Curia', has been produced this year, with copies available this evening.

The curia exists not to control, but to allow subsidiarity, with decisions being made at the lowest possible level, at the local level. However, to be more mission-focused there needs to be a shift in focus from bricks and mortar, to people, noting that funding is always necessary, and an 'enabling mission fund' has been recently established. There is a desire to enable all parishes to have all the resources they need, even when this might mean a degree of 'levelling up' to take place.

David Lawes, the Diocesan Chief Operating Officer, began with explaining that the curia wishes to support parish and deanery pastoral plans. We might have too many churches, but we are not here to manage decline. We want transformation, not rationalisation. We have a very good curial team, but it is a small team, and so might not be able to meet every challenge faced by every parish immediately: a development of capacity is being developed. Parishes need to be reorganised to be effective, they have to be good stewards of finances and property, and have the support to be truly missionary. This can be assisted by the establishment of deanery cluster administration centres, to relieve some of the administrative burden at parish level. The disposal of surplus property can be advised upon, the employment of project management support is another element of assistance, and an awareness of statistical trends can be helpful to communicate.

A desire to alleviate administrative burdens at the local level is another priority, since this isn't a missionary activity, although does have to be undertaken. Common, on-line systems are being developed (such as finance), alongside internal and external expertise for areas such as property, IT, and other specialist elements. Working with young people (such as the very promising young adults group, and the National Schools' Singing Project) are areas in which the curia offers direct assistance. Ways of catechising parents and families is another area in which the curia seeks to offer assistance, so that parishes can be rebuilt post-pandemic. Clergy are being assisted to be leaders and facilitators of mission. The curia is here to assist.

### **Feedback from the pews**

- Past performance is the best predictor of the future. Is the curia competent to make / assist with these changes, if the curia hasn't ever been known by the laity in the past? The curia hasn't necessarily communicated well with the diocese before.
- Although the curia is a professional body, there is much to be done, and in a short space of time – this causes concern that everything can be done.
- The diocesan website offers a lot of information, and can be a place of learning for individuals to know more about how our Church (diocese) works.
- Can some posts in parishes be funded, so that younger people can apply for them?
- Will copies of the slides from tonight's meeting be circulated?
- In a few years' time will there be the opportunity to come together again and review where we're at and how the change has been effected?
- It's heartening to see those present at tonight's meeting, but sometimes the statistics (Mass attendance, etc) don't tell the full story. The commitment of individuals present tonight tells a positive story, allowing for the foundations of a wonderful diocese to be laid.
- A time line will emerge, particular to each parish / clustering, some of which haven't been well know before, and which are becoming apparent only tonight.

Bishop Patrick addressed the meeting, noting that this is step one in the journey, and thanked everyone present for their openness in the meeting. Notes from the meeting will be made available via the Dean; please ensure that these notes are shared far and wide within each parish, sharing with those not present what you've seen and heard. The crucial question now is 'what do we do next to make this work'? During Eastertime a visit to the deanery will be made by the Vicar General, Canon Eddy, to see what progress has been made towards making this work. Timelines will be discussed and all viable options considered. The emphasis is on everyone in each parish, not just those present tonight. We need to present this not in a

negative way, but in an honest way. The reason for all of this is to be more missionary, more outward-focussed, and more active in our faith.

The bishop ended with a reading from Saint Paul's prayer to the young Church in Ephesus: the breadth and the length, the height and the depth of God's love for us, which is beyond all knowledge. Glory be to Him, whose power is at work in us, for ever and ever.