

Special Parish Meeting

7.15pm Tuesday 23 July, St Philip Neri Parish Hall

Eucharistic communities of St Bernadette's Bolsover, St Joseph's Shirebrook, St Philip Neri Mansfield and St Teresa's Market Warsop. School communities of St Joseph and St Philip Neri with St Bede's.

1. **Present** - Fr John Kyne, Fr Jonathan Whitby-Smith, and approximately 50 parishioners from across our 4 churches.
2. **Prayer** - The meeting began by prayer to the Holy Spirit, led by members of our communities.
3. **Diocesan plan** – Fr John and Fr Jonathan, with the help of Sr Susan and Sr Mary, presented the following information to the meeting:

The Diocese

The context for the meeting was set by first looking at the whole diocese, with its population centers and rural areas, and a recognition of the importance and challenge of the task of ensuring that all of our communities are well served by clergy. Our geographical position, bordering Hallam Diocese to the north was noted.

It was noted that back in 2011/2012 when we first began talking about the need to restructure our pastoral provision as a diocese as part of the 'You are Living Stones' consultation we had 108 churches served by 94 priests in active ministry. Since then several churches have closed, but clergy numbers have continued to decline at a much greater rate. The medium projection of clergy numbers given in YALS predicted around 60 priests still in active ministry by 2020, with that number dropping as low as mid 40's by 2025.

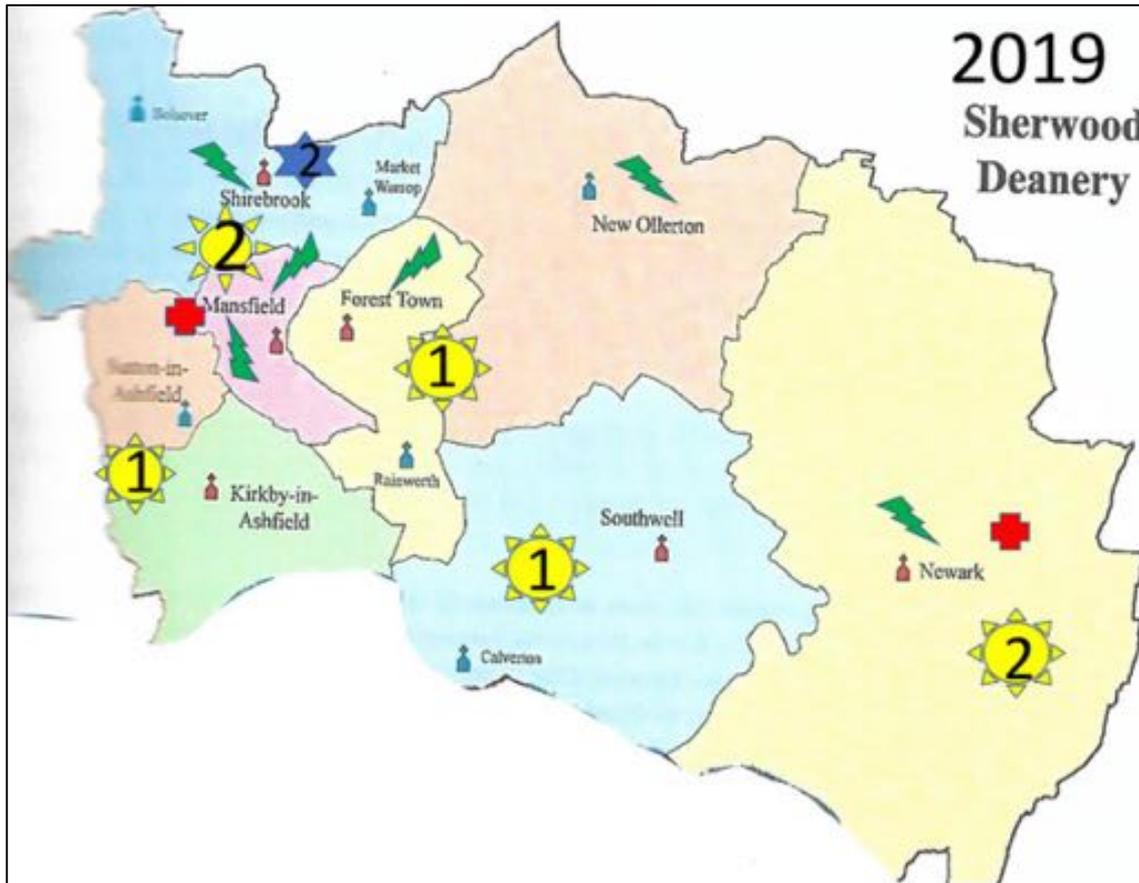
The time has now come to seek lasting change together which will support us into the future. Change is already happening across the diocese, one example being the merger of the two Nottingham deaneries into one.

The Deanery Currently

Every deanery has been asked to look forward to 2021 and to discern a pastoral plan. In order to do so we first refreshed our memories as to the current structure of Sherwood Deanery.

Currently our Deanery has the following structure:

12 Churches arranged into **5 Pastoral Areas** cared for by **7 priests** in active ministry. There are **5 primary schools** and **1 secondary school** in the deanery. There are **2 hospitals** that require the regular and ongoing attention of a priest, and several other hospitals, homes and the hospice that clergy are called to. There is **1 convent with our two sisters**.



At the beginning of 2019 our pastoral areas are as follows (in no particular order):

1. 2 priests resident at Holy Trinity Newark caring for 1 primary school and 1 hospital.
2. 1 priest resident at Our Lady of Victories Southwell, and serving St Anthony's Calverton.
3. 1 priest resident at St Patrick's Forest Town, and serving St George's Rainworth and St Joseph's Ollerton caring for 2 primary schools.
4. 1 priest resident at Our Lady Help of Christians Kirkby-in-Ashfield, serving St Joseph the Worker Sutton-in-Ashfield caring for 1 secondary school in Mansfield.
5. 2 priests resident at St Philip Neri Mansfield, Serving St Bernadette's Bolsover, St Joseph's Shirebrook and St Teresa's Market Warsop caring for 1 hospital and 2 primary schools.

Across our 5 current pastoral areas there are **20 Sunday Obligation Masses** celebrated each weekend.

The Proposal of the Diocese:

In March the bishop informed the clergy of each deanery in the diocese how many clergy they will have available to serve their area as of 2021. He has also stipulated that for the wellbeing of clergy, and to ensure that changes are future proofed, no priest should regularly undertake the celebration of more than 3 Sunday Obligation Masses across a weekend.

The Sherwood Deanery has been allocated **5 priests** in 2021. That gives us a cap of **15 Sunday Obligation Masses** across a weekend.



It has been proposed that the deanery be reorganized into 3 new Pastoral Areas. These would be as follows (in no particular order):

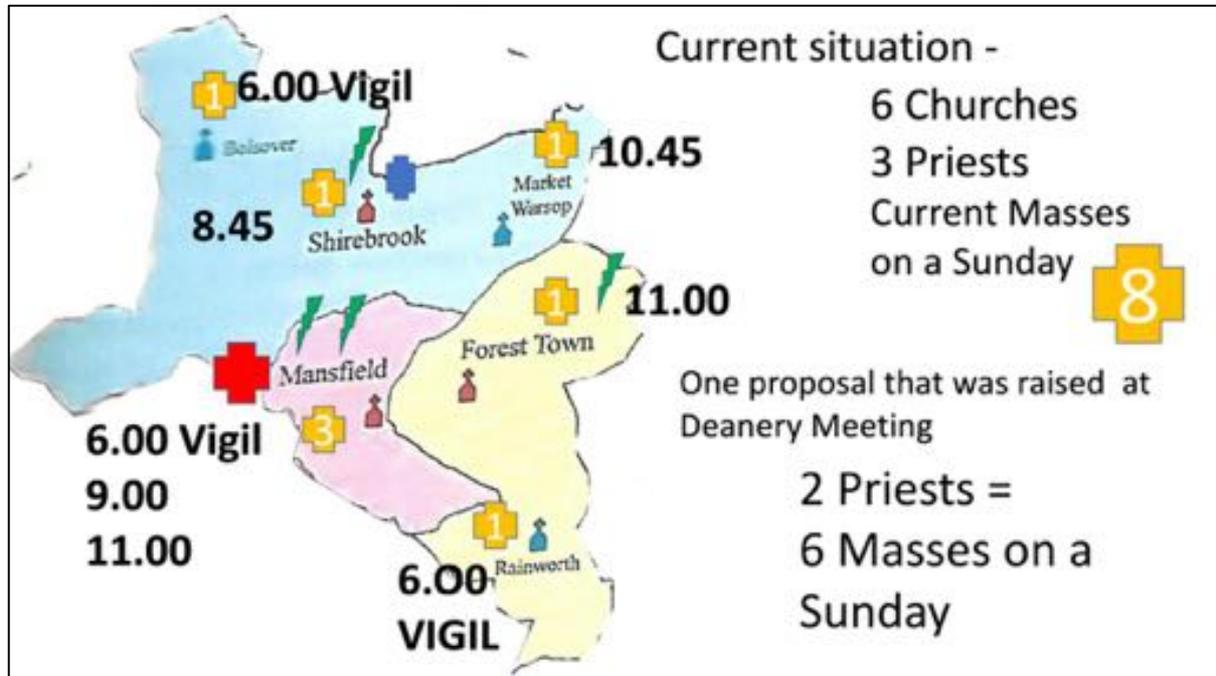
1. 2 priests resident at Holy Trinity Newark, serving, St Anthony's Calverton, St Joseph's Ollerton and Our Lady of Victories Southwell, caring for 2 primary schools and 1 hospital.
2. 1 priest resident at Our Lady Help of Christians Kirkby-in-Ashfield, serving St Joseph the Worker Sutton-in-Ashfield, caring for 1 secondary school in Mansfield.
3. 2 priests resident at St Philip Neri Mansfield, serving St Bernadette's Bolsover, St Patrick's Forest Town, St George's Rainworth, St Joseph's Shirebrook and St Teresa's Market Warsop, caring for 3 primary schools and 1 hospital (with All Saints secondary within the parish).

Meetings are taking place at the moment across all 5 of the current pastoral areas to gather the wisdom and input of parishioners as to how this new model can be implemented. Each of the new pastoral areas will come with its own challenges, but for the moment we will focus only on our own newly proposed pastoral area.

It was noted by Fr Jonathan that the deanery, and clergy personally, had asked for an exemption from the 3 Masses cap. The deanery had also asked about the possibility of Word and Communion liturgies on a Sunday. Both questions received a negative response.

Our Pastoral Area – the current situation

There are currently 3 priests working across what will be our new 2021 Mansfield Pastoral Area celebrating **8 Sunday Obligation Masses** across **6 churches**, caring for **4 schools** and **1 hospital**, we are also blessed with our **two sisters**.



We can, at the moment, only speak to our 4 churches and the schools and hospital we have care of. However, it is important to note that parish level discussions in the current cluster of Forest Town, Rainworth and Ollerton began last week – and as part of that it was asked that Forest Town consult on the possible closure of St Patrick’s church.

The consultation on the closure of St Patrick’s is the evolution of an idea proposed by the deanery clergy. It was noted by the clergy of the deanery that St Barbara’s, the Polish Catholic Church, faces the expiry of its lease in 2022. It was thought that given the inevitable need for reduction in Masses across the deanery offering them one of our churches would both aid them and keep a church open. St Patrick’s was suggested because of its proximity to both St Barbara’s, and also to St Philip Neri for those from that area who wished to attend Mass in English. The Polish Mission graciously declined the offer.

Various points for clarification were raised before breaking into discussion groups.

- What is the congregation at each church?
Fr John & Fr Jonathan: This Sunday the congregations were as follows:

Bolsover	28 adults	7 children
Shirebrook	54	10 approx.
Warsop	54	10 approx.
Mansfield	461	40+ (refers only to 11am Mass, not all Masses)

Forest Town and Rainworth Mass attendance not know, though it is noted from the yearbook that they have a combined Mass attendance of roughly 160.

- The need to consider provision for the young people and the priests serving the schools. If the number of Sunday Masses is reduced this would help but from St Patrick's perspective how would provision pan out for school if the local church is closed?
Fr Jonathan assured it is essential to meet the needs of all schools, ideally with weekly school Masses. This good practice must continue.
- Churches do not have to close because a Sunday celebration of Mass is not taking place?
- Regarding a question raised about the Hospital Chaplaincy and whether this could be served from elsewhere, Fr. John confirmed he is the named hospital chaplain. He is supported in this by Fr Jonathan and they are assisted by Eucharistic Ministers from across our churches and the Ashfields who visit patients and take Holy Communion to them. Fr John did not see how this responsibility could be moved elsewhere.

Summary of the Discussions

Suggestions for moving forward in light of the Proposal

- Not to close a Mass Centre. We need to be flexible – perhaps have a Mass once every 2 weeks this would keep the community alive – alternate between Centres.
- Encourage parents to be involved in their faith journey.
- It is accepted Mass times will have to be reduced. It is suggested all the churches co-operate with one another. Do they need 3 masses at Mansfield? Some people thought 3 Masses should be retained at Mansfield.
 - If 3 are retained, then 2 churches need to close
 - If reduced to 2, then 1 church needs to close.
- If Churches were to close, be prepared to travel to another Church.; Offer transport to other parishioners, consider bus routes and times. If we close a church, use the finances for transport, can we share with school? Look at bus routes and how people travel to the churches. Are people willing to give lifts?
- Need to maintain commitment in relation to transport and not just for a year or so.
 - Note: Experience shows that such arrangements tend to be withdrawn.
- Concerns that decisions are made purely on numbers.
- Strong consideration needs to be given to the church being close to a school.
- Don't set things in stone. Phased interim arrangements - try and review.
- Get Professional “ Change Management” in to help.
- Warsop and Forest Town join together.
- We accept there will have to be change. If we make changes we do not expect it to work straightaway.
- Communicate with one another better, to consider the proposal and how much they share the other work in the church.
- We must be willing to do more.

What is being called forth from us at this time?

- We all need to be flexible re Masses in the different churches so that, if necessary, Mass could be said once a fortnight in some churches; this would show that church community that they are recognised and valued.
- Recognition and acceptance of change meeting the needs of each community. Impact of possible closure on each parish, school and community.
- Compromise
- Thinking outside the box
- Well -being of clergy/laity

- Serving and finding other solutions to meet the needs of the young people.
- Possibility of challenging current suggestion of closing Forest town. Need to take into account the expanding housing development close to St Patrick's church. St Patricks has a thriving parish and school – very strong.
- Need to evangelise parents to encourage year long attendance at Mass and at confession and communion.
- Mobility of the Congregation
- Prayer.
- Be considerate of the work and demands on Clergy and also Sisters – do we need to be prepared to take more responsibility.
- How to work with our young people
- Not aware of the context of each church/parish to make decisions. We need a bit more knowledge of each parish to enable going forward.
- Consideration of the work done in schools – include parents more and work with them.
- To consider the missionary aspect and role of the Churches and Parishes – it's not just about Mass attendance.
- There is a tail-off in numbers attending church because the parents do not bring children to church after their First Holy Communion. We need to look at ways to stop this tailing-off and work with parents to keep the children coming to church.

Criteria in deciding to keep a Church open

- Size of congregation
- How active the community is
- Age profile of community – can they travel?
- Is it cost effective to keep church open given upkeep, what are the ongoing costs
- Can each church support itself – does it need support?
- Pool resources to build community ie Journey of Faith; catechesis, eg Baptism, 1st Holy Communion
- Additional parish support for Priests from Parishioners
- Capacity of church – can it support bigger congregation?
- Is it necessary to keep 6 churches open – leads to what happens to the church/
- Ask Parishioners if they want to keep it open – if so, how this can be achieved?
- Can the building have other users to improve financing?
- All parishioners need to do what they can to offer additional support.
- Consider the availability of Masses in nearby areas if the local church closes.
- Would it be cost effective to lay on a bus to bring people to another church if their church is closed?
- All churches should stay open. The community of that church will need to take responsibility for keeping the church open and for its upkeep.

More points raised in general conversation following the feedback from the groups:

- We need to look at provision for the young people and their involvement in the church.
- Question was asked if it has already been decided that Calverton and Forest Town churches close? It was clarified that the Diocese would make the ultimate decision. Strong feeling in the group that the proposal needs challenging
- We need to look at the whole to make the best decision going forward.
- Important to be aware that we haven't been singled out, every deanery in the diocese has been told how many priests and how many masses can be held.

It was felt that the Bishops needs to look at the allocation of priests outside the cities in relation to the rural areas. It was noted that the ratio of priests in England is much higher than in many parts of the world.

- This is also a time of optimism and hope - an opportunity form Parishes to work together – to learn from each other, for more influence and more energy.
- Wondering where are our young people are – not at this meeting or in the Churches. If we don't involve them, we don't have a future! How are young people invited and welcomed into our communities?
- What about those who are not here at this meeting?
- Why aren't the Bishops allowing us to have liturgy of the word led by Laity? It is happening in many other countries. Why not here?

Parishioners from all four churches were thanked for their participation in the discussion which will be taken forward to the next Deanery meeting on Thursday.

It was recognized that in this extremely well attended meeting, with good representation of all four of our communities and from our schools, there was a collective wisdom that could, and should, contribute much to our decision making in the months ahead. All points from this meeting will be fed back to the deanery, and ultimately the diocese.

Close – The meeting closed with prayer at around 8.45pm.