

Meeting of Delegates from the Sherwood Deanery – 12/12/2019

Venue: St. Philip Neri Church Hall: 7pm

Facilitator: Angela Gillespie

Present: Clergy of the Deanery (apologies from Fr. Simon Gillespie)

Delegates from Churches - see attached List

Srs Mary Deane and Susan Richert

AG welcomed everyone and shared her understanding of her role.

AG led the prayer

Delegates were invited to acknowledge their feelings about being at the meeting, these were recorded –

Open; anxious but hopeful; positive; change; trusting in the Holy Spirit; uncertainty; apprehensive; curious; anger
fear; disappointed; vulnerable; saddened; hopeful; realistic.

AG outlined aims of the meeting: *To listen to the wisdom and proposals gathered from the local meetings held across the Deanery in November*

To come to consensus regarding some proposals to be sent to the Diocese.

The process for the evening was described: Review the process so far

Listen to the feedback from individual Churches

Space and group discussion to identify priority points

Aim to finish by 9.15;

People were invited to help themselves to tea and coffee if they needed it.

There would be 5 or 6 in each group – a mix of Churches

Clergy would be in their own group.

AG invited Sr Mary as chair of the Working Group to give a review of what has happened so far. (cf Sr Mary's notes)

AG then invited each Church to feedback verbally on –

2 suggestions for moving forward as a parish Community

2 suggestions for moving forward as a Deanery.

The collected responses from the Churches is attached.

After the first response was fed back, there was some reaction to their response –

It was questioned why any church has to close; cannot compare churches in urban and rural situations;

The Delegates from the parish responded by referring to the task given them and that consideration had been given to aspects such as sustainability; well-being of the clergy. They said it wasn't easy to suggest a way forward and put it on paper but difficult decisions have to be made.

It was then quoted that a definition of sustainability is to – “meet the needs of today without jeopardising the needs of the future”

AG at this stage – halted the conversation because, every Church needed to be listened to in a spirit of compassion and not reacted to – it may well influence the responses of others. At the point in the process – listening was essential.

The other Delegates were called upon, church by church, to feedback.

There was some honest, searching self-evaluation by the delegates regarding their Church especially in regard to what they needed to look at to move forward as a Parish Community.

At the end of all the feedback, there were a couple of comments

- ✚ 12 Churches; 5 priests – one Mass in each Church and 2 Masses in the larger Churches.
- ✚ Need to involve School pupils and Students
- ✚ Some people have left the Church because of the rumour of closure of a Church.
- ✚ Can money be transferred between parishes?
- ✚ Can the finances of the Deanery be looked at as a whole?
- ✚ A question was asked about the veracity of the Vicar General’s Comment – ‘that when a Church closes one third leave; one third move to another Catholic community and one third move to another denomination?’
- ✚ Different models of grouping parishes need to be considered: eg (a) Southwell, Forest Town, Calverton and Rainworth (b) Mansfield, Bolsover, Shirebrook, Warsop and Ollerton

8.15 – the Delegates broke into small groups.

Task of Groups:

- ✚ Look for common themes that have emerged
- ✚ Create 2 or 3 priority points that you think should be taken forward to Bishop Patrick
- ✚ What issues affect the whole community?

There was a lot of energy and engagement to be heard in the hall. This was confirmed by the quality of the response to the task. Each Table fed back their responses and it was noted that there was a lot of similarities in what emerged from all of the groups. Collated Responses from the Small Group Discussions:

✚ Common themes

- No Church should need to close, certainly not in the immediate future but may need to keep the possibility of closure on the agenda.
- Church is about community, a living faith community. Need a top down overview of the Diocese in order to have a fair sharing of resources and provisions.
- Feeling of togetherness at the meeting reinforced the importance of listening to each other as we seek to find the way forward. Importance of honest and open conversation – no secrecy.
- Need to be realistic. Age demographics within Parishes also needs to be considered.
- Need to be more flexible into the future. Some examples given - Mass outside Sundays, in different buildings. Mobile Priests. Use of Deacons and seminarians. One Mass per weekend in each church/community. Provision of Mass is our priority not necessarily buildings.
- Training and empowerment of the laity, too few doing so many roles.
- Prioritise youth – youth Mass; parental involvement. Give children and teenagers ownership/roles/responsibilities
- Communication /use of social media for evangelisation and engagement. Need for internet connection in Churches .

Priority Themes

- Establish a Deanery Council – with a strategic view, to develop a holistic and realistic approach to Deanery issues/finance/resources/ training/ fundraising. A Forum for reviewing proposals and feeding information to/from the Parishes.
- No Church closure in the immediate future. Engage with the Parish as to how to do this. Also some churches to become multifunctional, more integrated into local community and working with other churches.
- Youth Consultation to get their potential; evangelise
- Internet access at every church
- Role of Laity with children and within the Parish as a whole. Establish training hubs for empowerment of Laity to give them confidence to take on roles and responsibilities. Develop Pastoral teams in Churches.
- Transport issues – especially in outlying villages.

Issues affecting the whole community

- Fear of closure has caused fear, conflict, anger within the parishes, depleting numbers. Importance of giving feedback from meeting to the community to uplift it.
- Sharing out roles within the Church, develop Deanery council and parish pastoral teams to enable priest to delegate roles – young voices to be heard.
- Finance is an issue that needs to be addressed. People need to be more educated about the parish finances. Each parish should publish income throughout the year to better share funds in the Diocese.
- What are our responsibilities as Catholics? We need to take ownership.
- Transport links.
- Communication.
- Reduced access to priests if they are not able to delegate responsibilities.
- Evangelisation – engagement of schools, parents, children and young people from earliest point.
- Not what the clergy want or what individual parishes want – BUT what the Deanery community needs – greater laity involvement

Feedback from Clergy Group:

- There was a suggestion that married deacons be invited to live in presbyteries that become vacant – so there's a good leader; OR perhaps a good trained Catechist might use the Presbytery.
- Our concern is for the Pastoral Care of the Laity.

AG invited Sr Mary as chair of the Working Party – if she had anything to say –

SM: This evening was a culmination of a process, HOWEVER, we now realise that there is more work to be done. The working group will take responsibility to collate the information that has been shared this evening and send it to the Bishop.

There is a lot of convergence from the groups but there are still questions that need to be engaged with – such as

- what is meant by sustainability?
- how do we become a vibrant/evangelising community?
- how do priests and people work together
- this is not just planning for 2021 – but goes beyond.

It is important to have a space to have the difficult conversations – but we must beware of how we feedback to others – who have not been present here and are not aware of the process that you have been through. There has been hurt in the past because of what has been shared – importance of the context.

In response to the question – How is this going to be fed back to our Parish?

SM: Yes, share the feelings and take the opportunity to share but be sensitive – things can be taken out of context – I might only share what I heard/felt – this is not the whole story.....there has been a lot of compassion, a realisation that our situation is complex. There have been suggestions made BUT this is NOT a decision making group.

Q: Concern raised that secrecy from previous meetings has already caused much hurt and anger within communities. The importance of being open and transparent.

SM: It's not about secrecy – it's about sharing the whole picture.

One example was the courage of one Community looking at the document given and saying maybe these churches might have to close BUT – they went on to talk about - if that happened, then the receiving community/communities would need to be more outgoing, welcoming, inclusive – ensuring that they had the means to get to another Church.....The only thing that was heard was *this church might have to close*.

The delegates were assured that they would all get a written account of the meeting to be shared.

Gratitude expressed to Sr Susan for taking notes during this meeting.

Comments from the floor raised other questions –

- what do we need to do in our communities TODAY, this process has asked us to reflect on our own communities as well as the wider deanery community?
- What is the community I belong to going to look like in 10 years' time? Look at the age profile of those gathered here this evening, what is it saying to us.
- What are we doing about having the conversation with pupils and young people

Fr Michael O'Donoghue ended the meeting by thanking the Priests and community of St Philip Neri for hosting the meeting; Angela for her skilful facilitation; Sr Mary and the Working Group for their planning and work in bringing us to this evening.

Note from Sr Susan: As I sat and listened, watched, reflected – I was reminded of the letter of St.Paul to the Corinthians. There were difficulties and tensions within groups there as well. He reminded them and us, that we are all for Christ and we need to work through our differences in the Spirit of Christ.

One comment made towards the end of the evening was – ***How wonderful it is to bring us together.***

This is what we need to focus on.....coming together for the sake of the Kingdom of God.