

Diocesan Pastoral Council Meeting

16th June 2012

There were 23 members expected, but only 11 turned up. Bishop Christopher had to travel to Bristol later that day so he shortened the meeting, which only in effect then lasted about 2 ¾ hours. Was it worth going? Probably, but not a lot was covered.

1. Reports from the Deaneries.

The only full report came from Exeter. Cornwall and Dorset had not met, Plymouth had but only 3 people turned up and Torbay does not have a Deanery Forum. This led to quite a good discussion about the future of the Deaneries and their reason for existing. I had been very disappointed to learn that the last scheduled Dorset Deanery Meeting had been cancelled – due to the large number of apologies – and that there were to be no more (at the suggestion of Bishop Christopher) till a new Bishop had arrived, and only then if he decided to have them. I put forward an argument for the continuation of the Forum, at least until a new bishop is found, especially as this could take years. I said that it is the only method of communication between the Laity of the Deanery, and that it is a good opportunity to learn what is happening in other parishes across the Deanery. Without such a thing we are very much an isolated island within a large sea that is the Deanery and the vast ocean of the Diocese. However, for the Forum to be properly effective it needs membership from all Parishes. Bishop Christopher took in what I was saying, and I was backed by the others there, and he stated that he would contact the Dean and see about reinstating the meetings, and also try to encourage the Parishes that are not at present represented to appoint an individual to attend. It does not entail any extra work for the already over worked PP's. Will this happen? I am somewhat sceptical, but time will tell.

2. Management of Larger Parishes with Fewer Priests.

Much of the discussion was along the lines of our own at the last PPC meeting. Bishop Christopher asked if

- a) the Parishioners' expectations of what the PP should be doing change when a Parish enlarges, and
- b) if the PP's expectations of what he himself should be doing change.

Father Draper's response to the last query was 'They are too high'. It was generally agreed that the priorities are:

- a) access to the Sacraments,
- b) caring for the needy and
- c) other areas such as Hospitals, Prisons, and schools.

The problem of people living a long way from the Parish Centres was discussed, after I had mentioned Portland. The hope is that satellite communities could develop, to allow those in these outlying areas to come together, and these could happen in other churches, pubs, Village Halls, or whatever is deemed suitable. The possibility of Deacons being allowed to do Eucharistic Services was raised, but Bishop Christopher wants to maintain this facility for

use only in emergencies, such as no priest being available on a Sunday. We should no longer expect to be able to receive communion daily was the message.

3. Update on the NSPCC Review.

The recommendations received at the last meeting are to be published on the Diocesan Web Site in a few days time. An Action Plan is to be formulated this week and put on the web site as soon as it has been agreed. It will be open to Parishioners to respond or comment on the documents.

4. Diocesan Vision Statement.

This is set out in the [Annex](#) to these minutes. The responses so far received have been summarised by Liz Toy (Exeter) and it is hoped to add to these when more responses are received. The final version of this document is what the Bishop will pass on to his successor to give him a clear picture of how the Diocese is functioning now.

5. Clear Voices Festival.

This was covered very briefly. Anyone wishing to attend should sign up soon as the places are filling quickly. It is possible for people to just attend the Liturgies, at no cost; the Sunday one will be more formal and the Saturday less formal.

Any other Business:

- The National Board of Catholic Women is organising a day on Domestic Violence on September 22nd, to be held at Notre Dame. This will be open to the entire Diocese; there will be a small charge and it will consist of speakers and workshops.
- Catholic South West. As Adrian Wardel is retiring it was suggested that the Diocese take it on, with the idea of making it a fully Diocesan newspaper. Bishop C will put this to the Trustees. Its importance as a means of communication across the Diocese was stressed.
- Food banks started in Cornwall were described.
- ‘Catholic Voices’, which is a group of youngish Catholics trained to talk to the media will be holding it’s next training session in Bristol soon. More information can be obtained by Googling it.
- Liz Toy has been tasked to establish a Catholic Medics group, aimed at all those working in Health Care.
- Bishop Christopher has asked if we can all have a discussion about the suggestion of moving the celebration of Epiphany and Ascension Day away from Sunday again, and will welcome input on this at our next meeting.

Next DPC meeting 6th October.

Judith Boichot

Summary Document “State of the Diocese”

These notes have been prepared at the request of Bishop Christopher who wished to obtain feedback from members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council on their views of the Diocese. The notes represent the views of members of the Torbay and Exeter Deaneries and the Parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea, Weymouth. The comments are a collection of the opinions of members, in part influenced from feedback they have received from their own parishes. As requested, the comments have been grouped to reflect the Diocesan Mission Statement.

The Diocese covers a large geographic area and hence can be challenged in coming together for many events and joint ventures. The Deanery fora under the guidance of the local Deans function very differently although there is enthusiasm of the laity across all areas for the Deanery fora to be developed further. This would enhance communication between neighbouring Parishes and facilitate sharing of experience and widen access to many of the items referenced below.

Celebrating

Throughout the Diocese we celebrate the Sacraments regularly and respectfully. Parish feedback suggests that parishioners feel that as a church we celebrate well – the liturgy as experienced at parish level is affirming, while at deanery and diocesan level it is frequently inspiring. Overall parishioners feel that although we can always do better this is a success story.

The liturgical celebrations in the Diocese cover a wide range of styles aimed at catering for all ages and tastes. Particularly highlighted are:

- A good number of Sunday Masses offered at convenient times with particular efforts to welcome families with young children to whom Masses are often tailored.
- Excellent provision within the Diocese for those who prefer a more traditional celebration of the liturgy with the use of plain chant.

However there is little provision for celebration of the Mass in a style more attractive to the significant majority of youth (and many adults who embrace the advances made at the second Vatican Council) and would welcome the opportunity to develop these changes and be engaged in a more modern but adult celebration.

Provision of weekday Masses are usually tailored to the retired population (the majority of parishioners) taking place mid morning. Other than on Holy Days of Obligation there is very limited (and inconsistent) availability for those working. Those religious communities where Mass is celebrated in the early morning are often generous in opening their chapels to the community.

Regular Masses are held in Polish and also according to the Syro-malabar rite.

A number of parishes hold a Mass to celebrate the diverse origins of our population on an annual basis. Special masses are held periodically for the sick and housebound in a number of parishes.

Other Church based liturgies e.g. Holy Hour and/or Benediction are available weekly in the majority of Parishes once per week again during office hours.

At the present time due largely to geographic factors the concept of Diocesan or even Deanery celebration is not really understood by the vast majority of our congregations with

attendees at the major liturgical celebrations often being those involved in catechesis or other ministries outside their own Parish. However the liturgies at these events are felt to be very particularly inspiring.

We are fortunate to have a number of gifted Deacons who assist their priests in many ways.

Particular recommendations for the future would include:

- The diocese would benefit from having more Deacons.
- There is a need for more lay ministers and a more regular change of ministers with regular meetings for spiritual uplift.
- There ought to be a more frequent coming together of Parishes and Deaneries for the celebration of Mass and other liturgies e.g. The celebrations with the relics of St Therese and the day at Plymouth Pavilions with Sr Helen Prejean
- Churches should be open for prayer during the day.
- Perhaps younger enthusiastic, priests and deacons could lead and invigorate parishes
- The Liturgy, Spirituality & Music groups contribute a lot to the Diocese, their roles could be promoted.
- Parishes could do with a little more encouragement.

Learning

Children's Liturgy Groups The majority of parishes have active children's liturgy groups and children's sacramental preparation however there is little or no instruction for young people outside these groups. Rare parishes have an active youth group with both theological and social activities being arranged. Particularly in the Exeter Deanery where there are no Catholic Secondary Schools, many young people from Catholic families attend groups in the Anglican tradition with their school friends.

RCIA Provision for this has been inconsistent across the Diocese. Often the smaller parishes with just one or two candidates have suggested attendance of a larger city-based group which is not ideal from their ongoing faith journeys. Additionally some parishes have been reluctant to engage with the RCIA process or the Rite in its entirety.

Ongoing Adult formation We are fortunate in having an excellent (but very small) department of formation who are very supportive of initiatives in local parishes. There is however a much greater need than is currently being met currently. There is a perception that these learning opportunities are too focussed on Plymouth with geography being a barrier to attendance. A number of lay led initiatives e.g. the Torbay Spirituality Commission have provided important formation opportunities.

Faith Based Discussion Groups There are very few fora for faith based discussion groups in the Diocese although CAFE has been run successfully in some parishes

University Chaplaincy The Exeter University Chaplaincy tends to focus its efforts on the student population compared to the chaplaincies of other major universities (possibly with a greater influence of consecrated religious) where the Chaplaincy serves as a focus for intellectual debate and serves a much wider community.

Catholic Schools Catholic primary schools have strong links to local parishes but there is less availability of secondary Catholic education.

Caring

Within the Deanery established societies e.g. SVP and CWL are well supported and contribute greatly to the local communities. Their membership is however largely past retirement age. Other organisations e.g. the Knights of St Columba have found their numbers greatly diminished.

Data protection legislation can prevent a need being identified.

Safeguarding legislation has a negative impact on initiatives relating to a caring role as the process is perceived to be cumbersome and time consuming.

CAFOD is well supported throughout the Diocese.

Hospital Chaplaincy is an area that struggles due to lack of man-power. The Chaplain and priests in the Deanery are very responsive to individual requests for hospital visits which are greatly appreciated however they are not able to be simply available to mingle with staff and patients. A number of volunteers do visit the hospitals (which is greatly appreciate) although there is a shortage of extra-ordinary ministers of communion prepared to undertake this ministry. Much of the support of staff members is carried out by lay people, often of no religious background.

Housebound parishioners have the opportunity of celebrating the Eucharist through extraordinary Ministers of Communion although the requirement for CRB checking limits the timeliness and ease with which people come forward to offer their ministry. There is a concern that this ministry is largely met by an aging group of Parishioners who are unable to meet/ keep up with increasing demand.

Other ministries e.g. to prisoners and seafarers is very good in some areas but deficient in others.

Parishioners feel that we are supportive of missionary work, as we contribute to CAFOD, MISSION, Aid to the Church In Need, AOS, etc.

Many individuals support others in diverse ways often privately. There are many Catholics involved in ecumenical charities e.g. For the homeless, Street Pastors etc. However there are very few local projects which have a distinctive Catholic identity.

Parish feedback suggests that while the members of the Church are seen as caring as individuals, and also groups and organisations successfully fulfil caring roles, the institution of the Church is not seen in this way.

Living

Particularly within the Exeter Deanery there is very low visibility of religious orders, largely due to dwindling numbers. Likewise there is limited visibility of or contact within the Diocese to secular institutes/ lay fraternities or associates to the major orders. This is a concern when we look to the future. Some orders invite non members to join in their special days the Diocese should be more proactive in disseminating these invitations.

Vocation Discernment

There is a clear contact for men wishing to explore entry to the priesthood however there is no formal structure or guidance available to women looking to explore consecrated life.

Communication

Communication is very patchy across the Deaneries and Diocese. Although more parishes are developing websites these are only used by small numbers of the population. Many including the Diocesan website are out of date and only infrequently updated. Little use is made of social media. There is a need for a forum to advertise events in different parishes better as many communications do not get widely distributed.

General

Our churches are generally in good repair although there is limited accommodation e.g. . a parish hall for large Parish events in many parts of the Diocese.

There is consensus that we could and should do more in relation to Justice and Peace issues.

Across the Diocese there is involvement in ” Churches together” and other Christian Unity initiatives although enthusiasm and participation for this is variable.

Greater use could be made of the gift aid scheme.

The majority of Parishioners are content with the way their parishes run. Most see them as successful in supporting individuals in their own private faith journey. The majority of criticisms are raised by those who seek to evangelise as we may not be as welcoming as parishes as we like to think we are. Parishioners are generally very grateful for the Ministry of their Clergy and seek to support them in practical ways. There are regular calls for more involvement of women in positions of influence within the Church. Likewise there is a strong feeling that the laity have much (and would like) to offer if the clergy were more receptive to help in some areas.

In some areas of the Diocese our church is seen as existing rather than living, and not moving forwards as it should be. “An ageing church rather than a living church.”

Liz Toy