



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

VISION DOCUMENT

Introduction

The Great Jubilee of the year 2000 was the most significant event in the recent history of the Church. In a series of documents leading up to the Jubilee, Pope John Paul II encouraged us to prepare well for that event. At the close of that year, in his Letter 'At the Beginning of the New Millennium' (Novo Millennio Ineunte) he reflected upon the themes which gave the Jubilee lasting significance and, in the light of those themes, dealt with many of the issues which would be important for the life of the Church in the new Millennium. The Pope stressed that at the heart of the Jubilee was the historical fact that two thousand years ago, God became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ and that through Christ the whole human race is invited to share in God's own life. That invitation has continued through the work of the Church.

But the Jubilee did not just look back. That sharing in God's life is offered equally to our present age and indeed to all future generations. The inspiration and constant theme of the Pope's Letter is found in the Gospel scene where Jesus, speaking from Simon Peter's boat on Lake Gennesaret says to Peter: 'Put out into the deep...Duc in altum (Luke 5:4). The Pope repeats this phrase when he exclaims: 'Duc in altum! These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb.13:8)' (para.1).

These words make it clear that the Pope is not writing at some general, theoretical level. It is important that the challenge of 'launching into the deep' should be a reality for all Catholics. And so he writes: 'It is in the local churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified - goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources - which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture' (para.29).

The same spirit which motivated the Pope's Letter has been at work in the Diocese of Brentwood for some years past as we have engaged in pastoral planning. Our starting point has very much been the glad recognition of the countless sacrifices, wonderful dedication and outstanding achievements of the former members of our Diocese:- clergy, religious and laity. What we enjoy now and what we plan for in the future is only possible because of these previous generations. It is obvious however that the circumstances in which they lived and worked have changed. As a result, since the early 1990s our Diocese has engaged in active pastoral planning to meet these changes. However, it is important not just to undertake our planning as a 'knee-jerk' reaction to events. It is above all an opportunity to remind ourselves of what it actually means to be a member of the Church and of how truly radical is the Lord's call 'Follow me'. The best guide to helping us understand our vocation will be found in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and these teachings, together with their development in subsequent Church documents, form the basis of our Vision.

There has already been much fruitful consultation as part of the planning process over many years. It is right to acknowledge with great gratitude the hard work and co-operation that has been so evident at parish, deanery and diocesan level plus the Bishop's Committee for Future planning. It is important to make clear that such consultation and planning will continue and will be an ongoing and necessary part of the future life of our Diocese. But it is also essential to have a clear idea of where this consultation is leading. In other words, what sort of Church are we planning for?

The aim of Part I of this 'Vision' Document is to help us as a Diocese reflect on the sort of Church we are called to be.

So that our Vision does not remain at an idealised level, however, Part II of this Document looks at some of the ways - particularly through new projects and new approaches in thinking - by which this Vision can become a reality. Part II also celebrates the work already being done in our Diocese to implement the teachings of Vatican II.

I commend this Vision document to all parishes and communities in our diocese so that they too may use the contents of this document in their own pastoral plans.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ Thomas,' with a small horizontal bar above the 'i'.

Bishop of Brentwood

PART I

THE CHURCH WE ENVISAGE

A Church which is built upon HOLINESS

'In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often'. These famous words of Cardinal John Henry Newman remind us of two important facts. 1) That change is of the very essence of being human. 2) That perfection should be the destiny of every human being. These two facts are at the core of the Pastoral Vision for our Diocese.

Whilst we all know well what the word 'change' means, 'perfection' can be easily misunderstood. When used in a religious context it does not mean that someone never makes a mistake or never gets things wrong. The true key to its meaning is to be found in Jesus' words: 'Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Matt. 5:48). In short, perfection is a call to become like God. It is an invitation to spend one's life changing and developing into God's way of thinking and acting. It is a call to joyful perseverance. It is an invitation to share in God's own life and gifts and qualities.

In some respects, Our Lord's words were not new; they arose from a profoundly scriptural background. They were in fact the fulfilment of what is found in the Old Testament where God says to the people: 'Be holy, for I am holy' (Leviticus 11:45 & 19:2) and where God summons Abraham: 'Walk in my presence and be perfect'

(Genesis 17:1). Even these words do not stand in isolation and need to be read in the light of God's plan as revealed at the very beginning of the Bible. Here we see that we are called into existence by God - made in God's image and likeness - so that we may share a relationship with God. This is humanity's fundamental call or 'vocation'. It is noteworthy that the words 'image' and 'likeness' which occur in the opening chapter reappear (in chapter 5 verse 3) to describe the relationship of parent and child. Such a relationship finds its definitive expression when the Son of God becomes a human being. It is the Son who then teaches us what this relationship truly means and also enables every human being to enter it.

As followers of Jesus, we believe that such a relationship begins when we are baptised. This is why baptism is so important - it is more than a social event; it is more than making someone a member of a club. When parents ask to have their child baptised, in effect they are saying: 'We wish our child to become like Christ, to share Christ's life; we wish our child to be holy'.

Their request for baptism is equally a request for their child to become a member of the Church, which is both the Body of Christ and God's Holy People. The relationship which begins at baptism grows and develops throughout our lives. It is re-affirmed in Confirmation and then strengthened every time we celebrate the Eucharist. From the earliest days, Christians have affirmed that every celebration of Mass offers us the means to grow in holiness, to become more Christ-like. 'Jesus Christ our Saviour was made flesh through the word of God and took on

flesh and blood for our salvation. So, through the word of prayer that comes from him, the food over which the thanksgiving has been spoken becomes the flesh and blood of Jesus in order to nourish and transform our flesh and blood' (St Justin Martyr writing in about 150 A.D.). Through Marriage, Ordination, Reconciliation and Anointing, this relationship is seen to be the foundation of and the purpose behind the different phases and events of our life.

The starting point of our Diocesan Vision is to ensure that people are able to appreciate the implications of their relationship with God and to grow in that relationship.

Although this relationship is created and sustained through the Liturgy, it is of course not intended just to be confined to the time we spend in church. To be a truly living relationship it needs to be expressed through prayer, to be nourished through reading and study (especially of the Scriptures) and to be deepened through our sharing its benefits with other people. Such prayer, study and sharing is traditionally given the name 'spirituality' and there are different approaches as to how to explore these areas. 'In the Church, many and varied spiritualities have been developed through the history of the churches...In their rich diversity they are refractions of the one pure light of the Holy Spirit' (Catechism of the Catholic Church para.2684). To be true to the basic human vocation of sharing God's life, every human being needs a way of praying or a school of spirituality which enables their thirst for God to be met. It is recognised that in our contemporary society there is

at large a renewed interest in spiritual matters. This can take different forms. Whilst joyfully acknowledging that the Holy Spirit is present whenever any human being is genuinely searching for God, we believe as Catholics that we have unique and privileged means for bringing that search to its fruition.

Our Vision is that all members of our Diocese as well as all other interested seekers should be aware of and be able to find the means to deepen their relationship with God.

Once we appreciate the true meaning of the word 'perfection' it is no surprise that the bishops of the Second Vatican Council laid great stress on the fact that to be a member of the Church automatically means that one is called to be holy. 'Therefore, all in the Church...are called to holiness' (Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium] no.39). So important is this message that the bishops returned to it with the words: 'It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any walk or state of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in human society' (ibid. no.40).

Our Vision is that every member of our Diocese accepts as a priority in their life the call to be more closely united to Christ and to become more like Him.

A Church which is committed to EVANGELISATION

The last quotation above from Vatican II teaches us that holiness is not something idealistic or having no practical significance. Nor is holiness just for the benefit of any particular individual seeking it. Holiness exists for the good of human society. Such an understanding of holiness is rooted in the life and work of Jesus Christ for he came to bring life and salvation to the human race.

The key element in Jesus' life and work was His preaching of Good News. In St Luke's gospel, Jesus' first words in public at the start of his ministry are: 'The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour' (Luke 4:17-18).

The whole of Jesus' life and words and actions reveal that God's Kingdom has broken into our human world of time and space. It is a Kingdom which brings God's healing, God's reconciliation and God's life to human beings. That we can belong to such a Kingdom is, indeed, 'Good News'. It is the proclaiming and the sharing of this Good News to which the Church gives the name 'evangelisation'. 'Evangelisation means the carrying forth of the good news to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter the hearts of human beings and renew the human race. "Behold I make all things new" (Apocalypse 21:5). But there cannot be a new human race unless there are first of all new human beings who are renewed by baptism and by a life lived in accordance

with the gospel. It is the aim of evangelisation, therefore, to effect this interior transformation'.

These words come from Pope Paul VI's document *Evangelisation in the Modern World* [Evangelii Nuntiandi] published in 1975. Pope Paul explains that Our Lord was the first 'evangeliser' and he then entrusted this role to the Church. 'Evangelisation is the special grace and vocation of the church. It is her essential function. The church exists to preach the gospel..' (para. 14). Furthermore Pope Paul is at pains to point out that, while clergy, members of religious orders and teachers have their own special role in this work, evangelisation is not, as was sometimes thought, confined just to them. The Pope makes it clear that to be a member of the Church is to be an evangeliser.

It is the bringing of this Good News into human lives that gives the Church her fundamental purpose or 'mission'. 'The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Vatican II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity [Ad Gentes] no.2).

When they take part in this mission, members of the Church are, in fact, helping to fulfil God's plan: 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved' (John 3:16-17). It is for this reason that Pope Paul called evangelisation our 'obligation of love'.

Our Vision is to help every member of our Diocese to appreciate more deeply their role as an evangeliser and to enable them to carry out that calling.

A Church which is imbued with the SPIRIT OF SERVICE

'The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me'. In biblical thinking, anointing was a powerful way of showing that a person had been chosen for a special task. At his Baptism, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit. He was revealed as the Servant of God, the one who would enable a new relationship to be created between God and human beings: 'For the Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45).

It is significant that in undertaking his special role, Jesus uses the title 'Son of Man'. An important aspect of this title is to emphasise Jesus' humanity. Being truly human, as well as truly the Son of God, he lived among real people leading lives marked by happiness and sorrow, successes and failures, plans and disappointments. 'By his incarnation, the Son of God has, in a certain way, united himself with each human being. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved' (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [Gaudium et Spes] no.22). As both God and man, Jesus was able to show the presence of God in our daily lives. He revealed the dignity and importance of our human nature and our human activities and he showed how precious human

beings are in God's sight; he awoke us to the truth that to be truly human is also to be truly a beloved child of God. 'Christ the new Adam, in the revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling' (ibid). By showing us this, Jesus carried out a great act of service to the whole of humanity.

Just as he entrusted the work of evangelisation to his followers, so Our Lord bestowed on them the same spirit of service to the human race which marked his own life and work. It is for this reason that the bishops at Vatican II could say: 'The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of people today, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and the anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts' (opening words of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

In reflecting on the role of the Church, Vatican II reinforced the need for the Church to be outward not inward looking. In recent years, Catholics in this country have very much taken that message to heart and are engaged in community, political, social and charitable activities at local and national level. In doing so, it is important to recollect that we do this not simply as individuals but as members of Christ's Body. When we are engaged in this way, we are continuing Christ's work of service to humanity.

Our Vision should be to assist members of our Diocese to carry out this work with the same spirit of service that motivated the Son of Man.

Although it cannot be emphasised too strongly that this spirit of service is bestowed on every baptised person, it is fitting at this point to recall how this spirit has found expression in the lives of men and women religious throughout the ages. In the history of the Church, it is evident how the different religious orders, congregations and institutes have come into being - often at a time of particular need - as signs of service to both the Church and the world. Our Diocese can rejoice in the many nuns, priests and brothers who have served and who continue to serve us through ministries of prayer, education, social care, pastoral work and health care.

It is part of our Vision to value the presence of men and women religious in our Diocese and their witness of consecrated life.

A Church whose nature is COMMUNION

We are engaged in reflecting upon what sort of Church we envisage for the future. It is already clear that the nature of the Church will depend upon her role and mission, and that her role and mission is the same as that of her Founder.

In the first encyclical letter of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II built upon the teaching of Vatican II that 'By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in a certain way with every human being' (see section Service above). The Pope looks at this unity between God and humanity and considers its implications for the Church. And so he writes: 'The Church

therefore sees its fundamental task in enabling that union to be brought about and renewed continually. The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life...(The Redeemer of Man [Redemptor Hominis] no.13).

So what sort of Church can carry out this task? The answer lies in our starting point that Christ came to unite us with God and with each other. In which case, it is only a Church filled with a spirit of unity and expressing unity that can effectively carry out its task. It is crucial to ask therefore: what do we mean by 'unity'?

It is a basic human desire to want to live in peace and harmony. This desire exists not only on a personal level with our families, friends and neighbours but on a worldwide level too so that there may be an end to war, terrorism and violence. We long to live in unity because this will bring us peace. This fundamental longing is an important aspect of what we mean by unity and what Christian thinkers call 'communion'.

The greatest expression of communion is, of course, the life of love shared by Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Although of its nature, the inner life of the Trinity must remain a mystery, we learn something about it through the words and actions of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. It is a life of unconditional love which, when opened to human beings changes our human nature and brings freedom, healing, reconciliation and peace. Above all and amazingly, Jesus calls human beings to share in that life: 'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, so may they also be in

us...[May they] be one, as we are one' (John 17:21-22). We can thus understand that communion is both the expression of God's life and our sharing in that life.

That sharing however has its consequences for it means we in our turn are required to express that communion in the way we live. We too should be signs of God's essential love and unity. Hence it is that Vatican II can speak of the Church as being 'In the nature of a sacrament - a sign and instrument that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the human race' (Constitution on the Church no.1). Later in the same document, the Church is defined as 'a communion of life, love and truth' (no.9).

Looked at in this light, we can see why the Church is so crucial in God's plan for human salvation. It is vitally important therefore that people should be able to recognise this Church which conveys such a precious gift to humanity. Where will they find this Church? 'All must be convinced that the principal manifestation of the Church consists in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers' (Vatican II, Constitution on the Liturgy [Sacrosanctum Concilium] no.41). To some people this answer that the Church is principally found in a diocesan liturgy may be surprising; and yet the Church's teaching is clear. It is the Liturgy which unites us with God and takes us into God's life of communion. A Liturgy which unites all God's people is the best expression of this communion. It is equally clear that it is the bishop with his special

ministry who is the symbol of communion for and within the Church.

Even by just glancing at what is meant by 'unity', we can appreciate how Pope John Paul sees communion as a means of fulfilling Christ's commandment 'Love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34). He also makes it an essential aim for pastoral planning: 'To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the [third] millennium, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and to respond to the world's deepest yearnings. But what does this mean in practice? Our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up' (At the Start of the New Millennium no.43). Such a spirituality will enable us to see the life of the Trinity in ourselves and in others and through this unity to share in others joys and sorrows, to see the good and the positive in those around us and to make room for others in our hearts, bearing each others' burdens.

It is our Diocesan Vision to help foster in all our people such a spirituality of communion.

A Church rooted in COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

A communion approach in thinking about the Church inevitably means that membership of the Church is not something individualistic. Relationship with others and how we use our gifts for the service of others is of the essence to being a Catholic. 'At all times and in every nation whoever fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God (see Acts 10:35). It has pleased God however, to sanctify and save men and women not individually and without regard for what binds them together, but to set them up as a people who would acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness' (Vatican II, Constitution on the Church no.9). What is key in God's plan is how we relate to others and what is the quality of our relationship with them. The reason for this is because such is God's own approach as reflected in the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Yet within the Trinity each is revealed as having a distinctive personality and role. In the same way, everyone in the Church whilst sharing equally in membership of the Body of Christ has a distinctive contribution to make in serving the church community. 'The chosen people of God is, therefore, one: one Lord, one faith, one Baptism (Eph.4:5); there is a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons and daughters, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity...If, therefore, in the Church all do not walk along the same path, nevertheless all are called to holiness...Although by Christ's will some are established as teachers, dispensers of

the mysteries and pastors for others, there remains a true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ' (Vatican II, Constitution on the Church no.32).

The practical living out of this shared dignity and activity is often called 'collaborative ministry'. In other words, lay people, clergy and religious are called to work together and to support each other in ensuring that the Church carries out her mission. 'This is the full meaning of collaborative ministry; not simply to renew the life of the Church, but to enable the Church to be part of transforming the world' (Bishops' Conference document 'The Sign We Give' p.13). The most visible sign of this has been the steady development of new roles, ministries and activities open to lay people. In looking forward to this development we also recognise with great gratitude the many lay societies, groups and organisations which have supported the work of the Church in the past and continue to do so today. In our own Diocese a particularly fruitful expression of this collaboration has been seen in the work by lay people as Pastoral Assistants in a growing number of parishes and also in the establishing of Pastoral Councils at Diocesan, Deanery and Parish level.

However, 'Even when [collaborative ministry] is established and growing, it is vital that it remains open to further change...It is built upon mutual trust and commitment' (The Sign We Give p.29).

It is our Vision that the true nature of collaborative ministry should be appreciated by every

member of our Diocese and that support should be given to ensure the spirit of trust and commitment necessary for its future development.

A Church which SUPPORTS ITS CLERGY

Once we appreciate a 'communion' understanding of the Church and the necessity for collaborative ministry, then 'The way in which the identity and role of the priest is understood shifts'. 'His pastoral and sacramental role remains vital, but with particular priorities. If his primary task is to enable communion to grow, rather than "to run the parish", the relationships he develops will be central to his ministry. It is through the quality of relationships that he will most effectively invite people to make full use of their gifts and energy in ministries and other activities' (The Sign We Give p.23).

It is quite clear that the role and identity of priests has changed since Vatican II. To accept and to respond to a change of this nature is a considerable challenge. We are very blessed in our Diocese with clergy who have risen to this challenge and who are, with great dedication, seeking to fulfil the ministry of ordained priest in the modern Church. For the future planning of our Diocese however, it is important to understand of what this 'changed' ministry consists.

This re-evaluation was expressed through Vatican II's Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests. This Decree made clear that a priest was not primarily a man set apart whose main function was to offer Mass. Instead, he was called from within

the People of God to serve the People of God. He carries out this work of service by 1] proclaiming God's word; 2] celebrating the Liturgy and 3] leading the community he is sent to serve.

The way in which a priest exercises the first two elements of his ministry are well known. Given our changed way of understanding the nature of the Church, it is the third element which has been given thoughtful explanation. 'This [gift of leadership] represents a very delicate and complex duty which, in addition to the attention which must be given to a variety of persons and their vocations, also involves the ability to co-ordinate all the gifts and charisms which the Spirit inspires in the community, to discern them and to put them to good use for the upbuilding of the Church in constant union with the bishops' (Pope John Paul II I Will Give You Shepherds [Pastores dabō vobis], no.26).

Our priests need ongoing formation and support to enable them to carry out their threefold ministry. They do so against a background of a diminishing number of ordinations and a corresponding increase in the age-profile of existing clergy. Our Vision should enable us to respond to these factors.

As another means of service to the People of God, the permanent diaconate was restored, following the wish expressed at Vatican II. The diaconate is open to married or single men and involves the threefold ministry of proclaiming the Word, assisting at the Church's worship and "service". This latter ministry is at the heart of the deacon's role. It means that the deacon is the Church's special representative to the poor, the needy and

the disadvantaged. The deacon brings the Church's spirit of care and compassion to many fields of charitable, social and educational work.

Our Diocesan Vision involves giving our clergy the ongoing support and formation they need, to ensure that any changes in parish structures do not increase tensions or pressures upon them and to encourage a proper appreciation of a vocation to the priesthood or diaconate.

A Church which values the FAMILY

'The family in the modern world, as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture'. These are the opening words of Pope John Paul II's document 'The Family in the Modern World' (*Familiaris consortio*). They express powerfully the feelings that many people have about the current general state of the family in our society. It is helpful however to set that view - as the Pope does himself - within the Church's vision of a Christian family. 'Believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica* (the domestic Church) (Catechism of the Catholic Church no.1656).

This title "domestic Church" is significant. So far in this Vision Document

we have reflected on how "The Church" is born of a selfless, loving relationship; on how our basic vocation as members of the Church is to respond to that relationship; on how the members of the Church are called to live in a spirit of communion; on how we are called to lives of service towards others; on how every member of the Church is called to be holy. To call the family the domestic Church is to say that the family has the privilege as well as the responsibility of being the primary place where Christian living is nurtured and where holiness, communion and service are everyday realities. It is clearly a challenging ideal.

At the heart of this domestic Church is the love of a man and a woman which is both a gift from God and a mirror of God's own love. 'Such a love, bringing together the human and the divine, leads the partners to a free and mutual giving of self, experienced in tenderness and action, and permeates their whole lives. Such love is perfected and increased by its own generosity. . . Outstanding strength however, is needed to fulfil the duties of this Christian vocation with constancy' (Vatican II, Pastoral Const. on the Church in the Modern World no.49).

Our Vision should enable all members of our Diocese to understand the true nature of Christian Marriage. Our Vision should also be to offer maximum support to couples who are striving to live out this high calling in their daily lives.

It is abundantly clear that at this present time there are great pressures and stresses

involved in family life and in marital relationships. Our Vision must also involve recognising these difficulties with understanding and compassion and offering couples the encouragement and support they need in seeking to overcome them.

The Church has always recognised that the family is also the first and most formative centre of learning. For example, it is in the family home that we first learn the habit of prayer. It is equally at home where we learn that the whole message of the Bible hangs on the commandment to love God with every fibre of our being and to love our neighbour as ourself. Each of us learns, with guidance, how God is asking us to put that commandment into practice in the individual circumstances of our lives. 'The family is, in a sense, a school for human enrichment...The education of children should be such that when they grow up they will be able to follow their vocation, including a religious vocation, and choose their state of life with full consciousness of responsibility...' (Vatican II, Pastoral Const. on the Church in the Modern World no.52). Parents are in a unique position to help in the process of discerning the true vocation of their children. One unfortunate aspect of our contemporary society is a general loss of the active awareness that God has called us into being and that God has a loving plan for us. Our Vision is therefore committed to help re-establish a culture of vocation in our homes and communities.

Our Vision is equally that we should develop the support needed so that parents may carry out their role as educators.

Traditionally the Catholic School has been the most obvious support to parents in this regard. We rejoice in the commitment shown and sacrifices made by previous generations in establishing our schools and colleges. We rejoice equally in the dedication and achievement of all those currently engaged in Catholic education. It is an essential part of our Vision that our schools should continue to maintain their distinctive nature. It is also right to remind ourselves that schools cannot be expected to include the vocational and sacramental preparation which is properly the responsibility of the family and of the parish community. The role of the school is to educate in a Catholic setting and to offer a formation in a Christian context and based on the values of the Gospel.

Our Vision is to support our schools in achieving this aim. We should also acknowledge the pressures and strains which are being felt in the education system at the present time. It is part of our Vision to encourage staff and governing bodies in the challenges they face.

A Church which believes in FORMATION

At the start of this section it might be useful to glance back over the elements of our Vision so far. It would be fair to conclude that it amounts to a demanding programme. This is only right however, since the purpose of this programme is to draw us ever closer to the person of Christ and to enter more fully into the mystery of

God's own life. To achieve this it is abundantly clear that we need formation.

Such formation works in different ways. For example, celebrating the Liturgy is 'formation'. The Eucharist is the supreme example of how this happens. When the Scriptures are read, we learn of God's nature; we learn that God's nature is to love unconditionally, to forgive, to reconcile, to heal, to encourage, to give life. When the bread and wine are offered and they become Christ's Body and Blood, we recall Christ's spirit of loving obedience, generosity and humility. More than this, Christ's own living presence enables us to receive God's own qualities and Christ's own spirit. Week by week, at a deep, mysterious level, God offers to be at work in us changing us more and more into God's own image and likeness. As St Justin wrote: 'The food over which the thanksgiving has been spoken becomes the flesh and blood of Jesus in order to nourish and transform our flesh and blood' (see section on Holiness pp.3-4 above).

But this transformation does not happen as if by magic. To be truly effective, it requires our co-operation and requires that we approach the Liturgy in the right spirit. We need formation to help develop that spirit. Such formation helps us grow in understanding of the structure and meaning of the Mass; it gives us the opportunity to reflect on our experience of Mass so that we may grow in appreciation of the mystery we are celebrating. 'Pastors of souls must ensure that the faithful take part [in the Liturgy] fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it' (Vatican II, Constitution on the Liturgy no.11).

What is true for the Eucharist is equally true of all the sacraments and so it has become common practice in most of our parishes that there should be some type of detailed preparation before we celebrate a sacrament for the first time. In this way, preparation programmes for baptism, confirmation, reconciliation, first communion and marriage are a valued and essential part of parish life.

In thinking about such preparation, we have entered the area which traditionally has been given the title 'catechesis'. It is a fundamental area in the life of the Church and extends beyond sacramental preparation. Early in the Church's history 'the name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, so that believing they may have life in his name (see John 20:31), and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ (Pope John Paul II, On Catechesis In Our Time [Catechesi tradendae] no.1). From the Pope's words, we can see that one essential role of catechesis is that it helps us to become disciples of Christ and it is appropriate to recall that the word disciple means 'learner'. To accept Our Lord's call to be one of his disciples means, in effect, that we are undertaking the responsibility of a life-long process of learning. We learn about the Christian Faith, we learn about the Church so that we may be mature, responsible disciples of the Lord. 'Catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into

the fullness of Christian life' (On Catechesis In Our Time no.18).

We have already seen that the first place that we experience this formation is, as a child, at home. But this pre-supposes an adequate and on-going formation for the mother and father so that they may share the faith well with their child by both word and example. Sometimes parents feel inadequate to this task, relying on the learning acquired at school in the past. In fact all the Church's teaching makes it clear that, for both parents and growing children, the parish is the natural place of catechesis. 'The parish is, without doubt, the most important place in which the Christian community is formed and expressed...The parish is also the usual place in which the faith is born and in which it grows' (General Catechetical Directory no.257). Effective catechesis in the parish would mean that our formation is not tied to any one period in our lives, but starts when we are young and continues for life. Such catechesis would assist in giving the confidence which can be lacking in Church members at times. It should also help in strengthening the gift of faith for ongoing development and growth.

Our vision involves fostering awareness among members of our Diocese of the true role of catechesis and of offering the support necessary to enable the parish to carry out this responsibility.

Within this general aim it is important to set priorities and it is helpful to see all the recent Church documents emphasise that adult catechesis must take first place.

Our Vision should therefore enable that priority to be achieved. With that priority we will set ourselves clearly on the path of offering the best formation to those committed to following Christ. 'Catechesis aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's word so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word. Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus aims to follow Christ and learns more and more within the Church to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity with his commandments, and to hope as he invites us to do' (Catechesis In Our Time no.20).

A Church which recognises the unique role of its YOUNG PEOPLE

Looking back at the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, Pope John Paul II was clearly deeply impressed and inspired by the presence and witness of so many young people, for he wrote: 'And how could we fail to recall especially the joyful and inspiring gathering of young people? If there is an image of the Jubilee that more than any other will live on in memory, it is surely the streams of young people with whom I was able to engage in a sort of very special dialogue, filled with mutual affection and deep understanding...I saw them swarming through the city, happy as young people should be, but also thoughtful, eager to pray, seeking meaning and true friendship...Yet again the young have shown themselves to be for Rome and for the Church a very special gift of the Spirit of God (At the Beginning of the New Millennium no.9).

A Church which truly believes in a 'communion' way of thinking and acting recognises the importance of diversity as well as unity. In our present times, an essential part of that diversity is the unique contribution which young people can bring to the life of our communities. Pope John Paul indicated joy, enthusiasm, thoughtfulness, prayerfulness and a spirit of friendship. These are just some of the special qualities that Young People offer. An essential part of our Vision is to encourage those gifts and qualities and to invite the participation of Young People in our communities and to enable those gifts and qualities to find their proper expression. To combine unity in faith and variety in expression of prayer and worship is a challenge which is key to the involvement of Young People in the life of the Church. It is equally essential to our Vision that we should offer welcoming, committed, spirit-filled communities which are attractive to the young.

Our Diocesan Vision should convey how valued Young People are by the Church and how much the Church needs them. Such a Vision also presumes that the Church, in the person of Christ its Founder, has a unique gift to offer Young People in their search for fulfilment.

The spirit of 'communion' is ultimately the spirit that seeks to bring together. It is this spirit which, at national level, has inspired our Catholic Youth Services to offer the theme Covenant as a focus for National Youth Sundays and as an underlying programme for the future. A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties in which each party has something precious to offer and to receive. A covenant recognises mutual dependence.

The idea is to foster a spirit of Covenant between the Church and Young People and the words of the promise are: 'To be a Church where young people can experience a real and living faith in Jesus Christ. To recognise the unique passion of youth'.

For many years past at Diocesan level, our own Brentwood Youth Service has worked unceasingly to create the spirit which inspires such a Covenant.

Our Vision should inspire us to enable that work to continue and to allow it to adjust to the changes which the future will inevitably bring so that Young People may fulfil their special contribution to the life of the Church.

A Church which fosters UNITY

One of the most noticeable changes in recent Catholic history has been our changed attitude to other Christians. The word 'attitude' is significant here. In contemporary usage, it can have the spin of implying arrogance and insensitivity. Its more original meaning however is 'a habitual mode of thought or feeling'. In other words, an attitude colours and informs our everyday way of thinking and acting.

Formal recognition of the need for a change in attitude towards our brothers and sisters in other Christian communities came with Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) in 1964. Its underlying principle was that there is already 'real but imperfect'

communion between Catholics and other Christians. The aim therefore should be to overcome that imperfection and to achieve full, visible unity. This is our aim because it is the Lord's own command (see John 17:21). And so the bishops at Vatican II proclaimed: 'Today, in many parts of the world, under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. This Council therefore exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognise the signs of the times and to take an intelligent part in the work of ecumenism' (no.4).

In the most forceful language, the bishops state the consequences of disunity: 'Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalises the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature' (no.1).

There have, in recent years, been a large number of ways in which Catholics have sought to achieve the aim of unity, some operating at national or international level, a good number operating at local level. The most visible way for our Diocese and our parishes has been by sharing in charitable and social work, by worshipping together, by giving united witness and by learning about each others' traditions. We acknowledge as both a joy and a responsibility that our Diocese of Brentwood has been such privileged ground in both East London and Essex for this type of co-operation and for the spirit of trust and openness which has been established through it.

It is our Diocesan Vision to continue that spirit and to explore ways of developing our co-operation.

It is important to be aware however - and particularly for our Vision of a Church built on holiness - that Vatican II also points to the spiritual basis upon which our work for ecumenism should be built. 'The especial duty [of Catholics] is to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed in the Catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more faithfully and clearly to the teachings and instructions which have come to it from Christ through the hands of the apostles...All the faithful should remember that the more effort they make to lead holier lives according to the gospel, the better they will further Christian unity and put it into practice. For the closer their union with the Father, the Word and the Spirit the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual love' (nos. 4 and 7).

It is essential to our Vision that we should rejoice at the progress towards unity which has been achieved so far and that we should seek the spiritual renewal which will allow that progress to continue.

It is also part of our Vision to adopt the words of Pope John Paul II: 'The ecumenical journey is certainly still difficult, and will perhaps be long, but we are encouraged by the hope that comes from being led by the presence of the Risen One and the inexhaustible power of his Spirit, always capable of new surprises' (At the Beginning of the New Millennium).

The search for unity is, at heart, a desire to heal the wounds and divisions within the Christian family. Through its call to mission, however, the Christian family is

very aware that it exists within the wider family of humanity at large and that there are many other faiths and religions which do not share its beliefs, common history or traditions. The bishops at Vatican II recognised this important aspect of life as follows: 'In our day, when people are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines more carefully its relations with non-Christian religions. Ever aware of its duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, it reflects at the outset on what people have in common and what tends to bring them together' (Declaration on the relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions [Nostra Aetate] no.1.

The Council grounds its teaching in the fact that all human beings have one Creator and share a common destiny. All religions seek to answer the fundamental questions about human existence. This common thread requires all religions to dialogue and to collaborate with each other, and is a sound basis for respect for each other's traditions and a resolve to overcome intolerance and misunderstanding.

Important as such dialogue and co-operation was in 1965, its need today is even more apparent. 'In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history', (Pope John Paul II, At the Beginning of the New Millennium, no.55).

It is central to our Vision that we should make dialogue and collaboration with Non-Christian religions an essential part of our parish programmes so that we may be signs to our contemporary society of harmony and reconciliation.

To bear the greatest fruit however, our relations with other faiths need to be based on lives which witness to and express the reality of our words. Such relations are thus an incentive for us to be stronger in our own faith and practice. 'Dialogue, however, cannot be based on religious indifferentism, and we Christians are in duty bound, while engaging in dialogue, to bear clear witness to the hope that is within us (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15)', (Pope John Paul II, At the Beginning of the New Millennium no.56).

It is part of our Vision therefore that our relationship with others should be an opportunity to deepen our own faith.

A Church which is committed to JUSTICE

In everyday language, the word 'justice' has overtones of legal systems and punishment, and although this sense sometimes appears in the Scriptures, the overall religious use of the word goes deeper than this. In the Old Testament something that was just or 'righteous' (it means the same thing) is something which is being true to its nature, is doing exactly the job for which it was intended; in other words, is being just what it should be. In

this fundamental sense, the word applies especially to God. For example, if one appeals to God with sincerity for forgiveness, then God will grant it, for God's nature is mercy and compassion and God must be true to his nature. God's 'justice' is most often seen therefore in the help that God grants and especially to the poor and needy; God is a Saviour to the oppressed. When justice is considered in this way, then it follows that the just person is one who responds to others as God would respond.

In the New Testament, Jesus is the personification of 'the Just One' When he declares 'The spirit of the Lord has been given to me for he has anointed me; he has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour', he is proclaiming the Justice of God's Kingdom and showing how Justice is at the heart of that Kingdom.

For this reason, Justice must be a key element in the Church we are envisioning. Its root lies in our fundamental vocation i.e. our call into existence by God. All human beings are created in the image and likeness of God; this gives the human person an innate dignity. All people are called to share in the gift of God's life; this makes us all brothers and sisters and from this relationship flow rights and responsibilities towards each other. Our Vision should be to make these truths a living reality.

When Justice comes about, when it is established, its first fruit is Peace. Hence the Church's work in this area is often called 'Justice and Peace'. At international

and national level, this work covers many concerns: poverty; exploitation; unjust financial systems; aid to developing countries; life issues; refugees and asylum seekers; stewardship of God's creation and promotion of disarmament would be significant examples. Looking at the global scale of these concerns we might feel daunted, particularly if we look at our human efforts in isolation. So it is encouraging to be aware of the words of the 1971 Synod of Bishops: 'In the face of the present-day situation of the world, marked as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognise both our responsibility, and our inability to overcome it by our own strength. Such a situation urges us to listen with a humble and open heart to the word of God, as he shows us new paths towards action in the cause of justice in the world' (Final Report of the Synod of Bishops, 'Justice in the World', no.29).

Our Vision should encourage every member of our Diocese to be committed to work for justice.

'Christians' specific contribution to justice is the day-to-day life of individual believers acting like the leaven of the Gospel in their family, their school, their work and their civic and social life' (Justice in the World no.49).

Our Vision requires that, as a Church, we must treat each other justly in our communities; that, as a Church, we must be just employers; above all that we must be just with the vulnerable, the poor and the disadvantaged and indeed with all those who in any way come into contact with the Church seeking help or guidance.

Our Vision also entails a continuing education in the meaning of true justice and of how we may increasingly lead lives which express in a concrete way the principles of solidarity with the poor and liberation of the oppressed.

A Church which values COMMUNICATION

It has become almost a cliché to say that we live in a world of rapid communication and technological revolution. Yet it is crucial that, as a Church, we grasp the truth that lies beneath such statements. That truth is that the modern world prizes and expects effective communication. We are not exempt from that expectation. In fact it is salutary to recall that the Church was actually born for communication. 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you' (Matt. 28:19). As part of our work of evangelisation, believing that we have Good News to bring to every human being, it is right to use all available means to communicate our message.

With the communications and information revolution in full swing, the Church stands unmistakably at a decisive point in the history of evangelisation and therefore of her own history. It is our Vision that we should gladly recognise and embrace the challenge that faces us.

Since our parishes are called to be places where the values of God's Kingdom find expression, it is important that particularly through the local media and every other means available to us we should communicate our activities as a way of helping others to be aware of those values. If an individual parish felt that it did not have the resources for such communication then this would be a good opportunity to co-operate with other parishes, perhaps on a deanery basis, to bring this about.

This latter point actually leads us to consider that communication is not just about the technical ways and means involved: there is in fact a deeper dimension. This dimension follows from the fact that the word 'communication' has the same root as 'communion'. In other words communication does not exist in its own right; it is there to promote and deepen relationships. And so when we acknowledge the importance of communication in the life of the Church, we are also asserting the importance of relationships within the Church.

We usually think of the Church in terms of the local community we know: the parish where we work and worship. As far as many people are concerned, it is the parish which is the main expression of Church life and where the Church is most clearly expressed. In the past - due to geography and lack of communication - it was possible for a parish to be thought of as a more or less self-contained unit. It is clear from the section on 'Communion' however (page 8 above) that the principal expression of the Church is actually the Diocese, seen at the celebration of the Eucharist which is presided over by the

bishop and where he is surrounded by his clergy and his brothers and sisters in the diocese.

It is worth noting in passing that one of the main underlying trends at Vatican II was to change the existing thinking about the role of the bishop. From the Middle Ages up to the 20th century it had been assumed that the bishop's role was mainly administrative; that the bishop was basically a legal, jurisdictional figure. Vatican II stressed that the bishop's original and true role (which had become obscured over the years) was to gather people around him to proclaim the word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist and other sacraments. Of the different duties of a bishop, the one always mentioned first is that of proclaiming the Gospel, of 'communicating' the Good News. In other words, the bishop is a 'communion' figure and his role is pastoral.

This communion approach to Church life will enable us to see a diocese not as an administrative organisation but as one community spread across a particular geographical area. Such an approach should also help us for the future when co-operation and sharing between individual communities and parishes will be not only necessary but more in the spirit of what it means to be a part of a Church whose very nature is 'Communion'.

Given the size of modern dioceses, some administrative structure is of course necessary; but the structure is there to serve and support the bishop, all the members of the diocese and all the local communities.

It is an essential part of our Vision that the work of the Diocesan commissions and other bodies should be effectively communicated so as to enable parishes to use the resources available and thus support the parishes in their role. Above all it is at the heart of our Vision that good communication at diocesan, deanery and parish level (and, indeed, between those levels) is key to the growth of good relationships and to our work as Christians.

A Church which embraces CHANGE

Although change is an inescapable and inevitable part of human experience, human beings, in the main, can have a less than welcoming attitude towards it. There seems almost to be something at the core of our human nature which dislikes change and prefers to keep things as they are now or as they have been in the past. This can be felt particularly strongly in the area of Church life. To some extent this is understandable. Many regard the Church as a place where we can draw strength for the struggles of our daily existence and for many of us, from a young age, it has been perceived as a place of security. When routine is disturbed or change introduced, this, for some people, produces feelings of instability and bewilderment. These feelings can be re-inforced if people rely on the impression (which it must be frankly acknowledged was not unknown in certain periods of the Church's history) that, as a matter of fact, the Church has always been

the same and that fundamental aspects of the Church's life are unchangeable.

This issue of exactly what is or is not unchangeable was one of the matters dealt with by Pope John XXIII in his opening speech to the Second Vatican Council. He stressed the significance of the Lord's command 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice' (Matt. 6:33) and explained that the heart of the Church's teaching or doctrine was to enable human beings to fulfil this command. Pope John makes it very clear that it is the substance of the teaching that is always the same (i.e. unchangeable) but not the way in which it is expressed: 'The substance of the ancient deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another' (ibid.). The purpose of the Council was to update the presentation of the teaching: '[The Church] must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world...' (ibid.).

Taking their cue from the spirit of these words, the bishops at Vatican II went on to decree that one of the aims of the Council was 'to adapt those structures which are subject to change so as better to meet the needs of our time' (opening sentence of the Council's first document, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

Changes are thus twofold. One sort of change is where the faith is presented in a new or different way. The other sort is where some structure of the Church itself changes to meet changed circumstances. Our Diocesan pastoral planning embraces both types of change. The aim of such planning is to enable us in our communities to be true to our vocation to

seek and proclaim the Kingdom of God above all else and to do so according to the needs and circumstances of the present day. This means that pastoral planning is an ongoing process which will continue to be at the centre of our Diocesan life.

It is part of our Vision that members of our Diocese should appreciate the need for change in the way that the Church lives and that they should be open to such change.

Above all, our Vision acknowledges the need for the presence and gifts of the Holy Spirit among us, for it is the Spirit who refreshes and renews and makes perfect.

It is fundamental to acknowledge however, that as well as being a place of strength, the Church is also a place of challenge, for whenever the word of God is proclaimed we are challenged to become perfect like our Father in heaven and such a challenge involves us changing and developing (cf. Cardinal Newman's remarks in the section 'Holiness'). To change means responding to new situations and circumstances. We simply do not have the option of standing still.

PART II

The Church We Are Planning

Some ways which will help us make the Vision a reality

It is important that we should, as a Diocese, create the opportunities to reflect on and discuss the principles and implications of this Vision Document. In the spirit of collaborative ministry, it is hoped that such reflection and discussion will occur at parish, deanery and diocesan levels so that we can together develop the most fitting and fruitful ways through which our Vision may be implemented. What will be clear from even a preliminary reading of our Document however is that a number of the Vision's aims are to some extent already in existence in different ways in our Diocese. This is because our Vision is based upon the principles of Vatican II, which, of course, first appeared forty years ago. It is also appropriate to emphasise again that considerable pastoral planning in our Diocese has already taken place. So we can see that we are not working or planning in a vacuum. At the same time, it is a constant theme of the teaching of the Church (and particularly of Pope John Paul II) that the work of implementing Vatican II is far from complete and that a continual return to its precepts will be the bedrock for the future life of the Church.

A foundational element of our Vision therefore is to celebrate the good things which are already happening in our parishes,

deaneries and diocese, to rejoice in the existing dedication and commitment of our laity, religious and clergy and to encourage a more widespread and ever deepening implementation of the insights of Vatican II.

As a Diocese, we make a clear statement of intent. We will adopt new strategies to meet the needs of a rapidly growing Diocese. Our ongoing process of planning will develop and strengthen our present initiatives and works and will enable us to address new challenges.

Here is an overview of some of the ways in which our Vision will be developed in the future as well as indicating what has been and what is being achieved already.

New Initiatives

- The Launch of a new Pastoral Support Team.

Parishes will need support as they address the issues raised by pastoral planning, as they seek renewal in their community life and as they become more effective centres of evangelisation. The Diocese is already forming a Team which will be available to give such support.

- Forward Planning through Linking of Parishes.

In looking at both the need to share resources between parishes and of deploying priestly resources to best advantage, the Linking of parishes is the most fruitful option. Diocese, deaneries and parishes will continue to reflect and

consult on the most effective ways of employing and developing this option.

- **New Building Developments.**

There are large building developments either underway or being planned in several areas of our Diocese, Thames Gateway, Stansted and Harwich being just a few examples. Consultation between existing local communities and the Diocese will continue to ensure that the pastoral needs of those in the new developments are discerned and met as far as possible. Good pastoral planning also requires that we should ask whether, in certain localities, existing buildings are adequate and conveniently sited for some of the new development. Consultation on these questions is already under way.

- **A New Young People's Retreat Centre.**

As a Diocese, we are already strongly aware of how essential in the spiritual life and growth of our young people is a centre for prayer and development. As a Diocese, we are very proud of the members of our Youth Service and of their work to parishes and schools through the existing Retreat and Formation Centre at Walsingham House. We have been very blessed in the generosity first of the Dominican Sisters at Chingford and more recently of the Sisters of Mercy at Canvey Island in making premises available to us. It is readily acknowledged however, that a more centrally placed, more purpose-built centre would enable the work of the Youth Service and Walsingham House Team to develop even more and so fulfil the aims of our Vision. The Diocese is actively exploring options to achieve this.

- **Diocesan Vocation Team.**

The Bishops of England and Wales have established the National Office of Vocations to support and encourage the building up of a new 'Culture of Vocation' within our country, a culture that will recognise and celebrate the vocation of each person, with a special emphasis on the vocation of marriage, priesthood and religious life. A most significant Diocesan initiative is the establishment of Diocesan Vocations Teams to carry out this task.

Development of Existing Resources

- **Development of Supporting Ministry.**

'Supporting Ministry' is the title given by the Bishops of England and Wales to the ways in which our clergy can be enabled and assisted to live out their vocation and carry out their ministry most fruitfully and effectively in today's Church. Our Diocese has already begun this process, chiefly through the involvement of the clergy themselves. In February 2003, all our clergy gathered together for a Spiritual Awareness Retreat which deepened even more their sense of fraternity and considered ways to strengthen support for their role. Through the Vision, we will continue to develop 'Supporting Ministry'. The future of this development is important, for a widespread concern is that, with reduced numbers trying to deal with a growing workload, our clergy will become over-burdened.

- **Fresh Emphasis on the role of the Brentwood Religious Education Service (BRES).**

The communities envisaged by our Document will need ongoing and deepening support and formation. Since its creation, BRES has been a pioneering group in these areas for schools and parishes and will continue to develop the most appropriate ways of responding to the changing requirements of our time. BRES and the new Pastoral Support Team will work very closely together in helping local communities reflect upon and implement our Diocesan Vision.

- **Ongoing Pastoral Planning.**

As changes and developments continue, our priority must be to ensure that people's pastoral needs are recognised and met. This necessitates a reflective but proactive process of planning for our Diocese. The Bishop's Committee for Future Planning will continue to direct and coordinate this process and to encourage and enable the necessary input and consultation from parishes, deaneries and diocesan bodies.

- **Promotion of Responsible Stewardship.**

A renewed vision of the Church automatically involves a renewed recognition of the responsibilities of each member of the Church. For the past two years, our Diocesan Stewardship Campaign has raised awareness of the importance of this issue and encouraged the work of lay participation which is already taking place. Stewardship will continue to remain high on the agenda as an essential element in the future life of the Church in this Diocese.

- **Encouragement for Parishes to work more closely together.**

Even where parishes are not formally linked, a spirituality of communion means that all communities should examine seriously the ways in which they might share resources and work more closely together with neighbouring parishes. Parishes will be encouraged to look at this question as a matter of priority.

- **Improving Communication.**

Whilst everyone acknowledges that communication at all levels needs improvement, it is an important consequence of our Vision that we should address this issue in our Diocese, deaneries and parishes in a spirit of communion and charity. We should seek to ensure that the achievement of good communication is constantly monitored by and shared between our respective Pastoral Councils and by Diocesan bodies. It is particularly relevant in this area to recognise with great gratitude the work which has been done by our previous Diocesan Communications Officer and all those who worked with him. We acknowledge with equal gratitude the ministry of our present Communications Officer, our Press Officer and all those who work so hard to produce Brentwood News.

- **Child Protection.**

The absolute importance of this area has become painfully obvious in recent years. The Diocese has established a very professional Child Protection Team and has recently appointed a full-time Child Protection Officer. The policy of 'Safe Children, Safe Church' has been readily adopted as part of parish life. It flows from the principles of our Vision that our Child Protection Policy should continue to

develop and should be not only reactive in any case of abuse but also pro-active in promoting a culture whereby our young people may contribute fully to the life of the Church in an environment of security, confidence and trust.

- [Strengthening the Links between Diocesan Commissions and our Parishes.](#)

Diocesan Commissions exist to support the Bishop in his role as Chief Pastor of the whole Diocese. They work therefore not only at diocesan (and sometimes at national) level, but are also equally at the service of all our individual parishes. The Commissions are actively engaged in working on ways in which awareness of their role can be heightened.

- [Refocusing the work of the Justice and Peace Commission and the Social Welfare Commission in the light of contemporary needs.](#)

Both these Commissions are a very tangible expression of establishing the values of God's Kingdom in our present society and of ensuring that these values have their rightful place in the life of our parish communities. As the pattern of contemporary needs shifts, so these Commissions will focus on developing the most effective way of addressing such needs.

- [Encouraging of Ecumenical Links and of Inter-Faith work.](#)

Our present-day society needs the strong witness of a united message of hope from Christians among themselves and of tolerance and respect between Christians

and the other major world religions. Whilst much effective work has already been done, contemporary events only strengthen the urgency of developing new ways of co-operation. The expansion of such co-operation is fundamental to our Vision.

- [Financing New Initiatives.](#)

The Diocesan Budget is already fully tied up with existing projects and, given the current financial situation, income is also fully committed. The Bishop has also given an assurance that any increase in the Diocesan Quota will only be for the annual standard-of-living salary rises and that the level of the Quota should, ideally, reduce rather than increase. Consequently, we shall be examining positively the fund-raising possibilities for these projects and will be launching a major appeal for the appropriate developments and works.

- [Development of Diocesan Resources.](#)

[The Diocesan House of Prayer](#)

First at Chadwell Heath and now at Abbotswick, the Diocesan House of Prayer has become for many an invaluable part of the spiritual life of the Diocese, under the dedicated direction of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. With the retirement of Sister Agatha from this work in the summer of 2004, a new community - the Community of Our Lady of Walsingham - has been asked by the Diocese to continue and develop the work of spiritual hospitality and renewal so well established by Sister Agatha and her team.

The Diocesan Pastoral Centre - The Barn at New Hall.

This Centre was established by the Community of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre in partnership with the Diocese and has made a wonderful and much-valued contribution to the spiritual life and formation of the Diocese, and indeed to the wider community. After much consultation and reflection, the Community has decided to move from New Hall and the future of the Barn is being reviewed. It is hoped that the Centre will continue drawing on the strengths of the past while addressing new needs for our developing Diocese.

Chigwell Convent

For many years the Chigwell Sisters have generously made available their meeting rooms at Chigwell and shown us great hospitality. The diocese gratefully acknowledges this resource and looks forward to this continuing collaboration.

Anchor House

The house in Canning Town was originally a Seamen's Mission under the aegis of the Apostleship of the Sea. When such a Mission was no longer needed on that part of the Thames, Anchor House became (and remains) a centre for temporarily homeless people irrespective of race, colour or creed. The Diocese has recently undertaken and is now in the process of implementing a recent review which will secure the future of Anchor House as a hostel and will look at how its resources may be developed to assist with the wider issue of homelessness in East London.

Stella Maris at Tilbury

The Apostleship of the Sea has sold Stella Maris, the residential seafarers centre in Dock Road, Tilbury, and will build a new Seafarers' Centre because of changes in the shipping industry. The growth of the work of the Port Chaplaincy in addressing the new needs of seafarers has led the AOS to look to work with other Christian maritime agencies to build a new Seafarers' Day Centre within the Docks.

The Cardinal Heenan Centre

The old school building of St Peter and St Paul in Ilford was originally developed as the HQ of the Catholic Children's Society. It is now a thriving community centre with local offices for the Society and for a whole range of local Church and community groups. A new Management Group has been set up to support the work and to plan development for the future. The Centre has been the recipient of many local awards.

Whilst a number of these initiatives are self-explanatory, it might be helpful to develop the thinking behind some of the projects mentioned above.

Ongoing Pastoral Planning

It cannot be emphasised sufficiently that pastoral planning will remain a central element in the life of our parishes and deaneries. Much important work has already been done and consultation with clergy and laity has identified a number of areas which must be looked at for the future. The details of the principles upon which pastoral planning are based, the

history of this process to date and suggested future developments are set out in Appendix I.

The New Support Team

One major aim of our Vision is to promote the renewal of parish life. This will inevitably necessitate changes in pastoral provision and a re-assessment of priorities in the life of parishes and Diocese.

In order to enable clergy and people to move forward with confidence, the Diocese is establishing a facilitating and co-ordination Pastoral Support Team, accountable to the Bishop and the Bishop's Committee for Planning, and consisting of a full-time leader and with part-time members called on as required. The members of the Team will work through personal contact and discussion with parishes, deaneries and the appropriate diocesan departments.

The responsibilities of the Team will include:

- promoting and supporting evangelisation as a primary responsibility of the baptised.
- ensuring that the insights and priorities contained in our Vision are promoted and implemented effectively.
- identifying and drawing on the giftedness, experience and expertise available in the Diocese of Brentwood in implementing our Vision in response to the current situation.
- encouraging and helping to bring about the sharing of resources - both human and material - at all levels, especially in deaneries and, as appropriate, ecumenically.
- raising awareness of pastoral and financial implications in parishes facing significant changes through linking and resource sharing.
- actively supporting increased lay involvement and the promotion of collaborative ministry wherever appropriate.
- promoting the significance of Christian vocation and stewardship.
- providing timely preparation, support and guidance for clergy and people in those parishes where linking is to be implemented.
- working closely with BRES and its adult formation team.
- coordinating the work of the BDPC in respect of pastoral planning.
- engaging the enthusiasm and giftedness of the young people of the Diocese whenever and wherever possible.

Responsible Stewardship

Stewardship is a tangible expression of our Vision principle that all members of the Church share in the Mission of the Church (a principle which is also sometimes called 'the priesthood of all the baptised'). When this principle is applied, it means that every member of the Church has a contribution to make to the life and work of the Church.

This principle has in fact always existed but it is fair to say that, before the Second Vatican Council, the contribution by lay people was limited to very restricted areas. With the teaching of Vatican II, the principle has been very clearly re-affirmed and the areas for lay participation have become more clearly identified.

It was to proclaim the importance of this participation and to declare that it has an ongoing part in the life of our communities that the Diocese established 'Stewardship Sunday' in 2003. This is an opportunity to focus and reflect on the need for and the extent of everyone's involvement in the work and mission of our parishes, our deaneries and our diocese.

The key concept here is clearly that of being a 'steward'. A steward is basically one who has responsibility to manage and care for property or goods. Because the property or goods are for the benefit of members of a family, a steward also has a responsibility in the running of the household. The role of the steward thus becomes one of developing and sharing resources with others. When it comes to being a member of the Church, the 'goods' or 'property' entrusted to us are of two kinds. The first kind is spiritual. God call us into existence and gives us the gift of life. God then calls us to be members of the church so as to share in the gift of God's own life of unconditional love. God then further invites us to share that life with others. These gifts of life are the 'goods' of God's household. But, because we are human and live in a material creation, we need communities and material resources as a framework in which to share those gifts. Such communities and material resources are the second type of 'goods' for which we are asked to care.

There are many ways in which we can contribute to the life and mission of our own particular parish household and - in the spirit of communion - to the wider Church, but all of these ways will fall under the heading of either 'time' or 'talent' or 'treasure'. The purpose of our Responsible Stewardship Campaign is to help us reflect on which one or more of these areas will be the appropriate way for each individual to make his or her contribution.

The motive for engaging in stewardship is thanksgiving. In the Church, we are given great gifts, we receive good things. One vital way of giving thanks for such benefits is to contribute to the life and mission of the community which brings us such great benefits. It is perhaps best expressed by the Conclusion of the stewardship leaflet for 2004: 'Stewardship lies at the very cornerstone of our Catholic religion. For what we have received, surely in our most humble way we should give thanks by offering to God our time, our talents and skills and our treasure'.

Strengthening Links between the Diocesan Bodies and the Parishes

As indicated in the section 'Communication', the very aim and purpose of the Commissions is to be at the service of the different communities and groups of our Diocese. It is the express wish of the Commissions and the other Diocesan Bodies and Organisations to make their role better known and their expertise more widely available. This has already begun through the Bishop's request that each Commission should visit all deaneries every three years. In addition, the Commissions and other Bodies were asked to summarise their role and to offer their own individual vision and to offer

their own contribution to pastoral planning between now and 2010. The full details of this contribution can be found in Appendix II. In the meanwhile, the following listing contains a very brief summary of how our Diocesan Organisations serve our Parishes.

The Liturgy Commission and Music Department offer formation and renewal for all liturgical ministers, development of pastoral liturgy at all levels, support in planning major liturgies and supervision of matters relating to our church buildings.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council provides a key link between the Diocese, deaneries and parishes in advising the Bishop of views and situations in local communities and in facilitating communication and co-operation at all levels.

The Social Welfare Commission has as its specific ministry the provision of help and support to organisations and individuals who manage the problems of people in need of social care. The officers of the Commission are available to offer help to individuals who may have personal social care difficulties and who find themselves without support from the statutory authorities.

The Commission for Education concerns itself with education issues affecting the Diocese and its purpose is to offer guidance and support to all those engaged in Catholic education. The Commission therefore is deeply involved with the life and development of parish schools and all people connected with them.

BRES is strongly involved at local level through its mission to provide in-service training, support and advice to our schools and parishes. BRES is particularly active in adult formation for all members of

parishes and offers ongoing formation for parishioners involved in sacramental and catechetical work.

Brentwood Catholic Youth Service aims to assist young people to appreciate and live out their vocation as Christians in ways appropriate to their circumstances. Through outreach and retreat work, the Commission is committed to working at local level to enable young people to take as full a part as possible in the life of the Church.

The Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-Faith Dialogue emphasises the importance of common prayer, encourages practical co-operation and promotes common witness. To achieve this, the Ecumenical Officer is ready to offer encouragement, guidance and support to ecumenical activities in local communities.

The Justice and Peace Commission works in promoting and defending human rights, in relieving poverty and suffering, in spreading peace and in building God's Kingdom. The Commission is available to all parishes to encourage the establishment of J&P groups and support work for the poor and homeless.

The Chancery and the Tribunal offer advice and guidance to parishes in the area of Canon Law, help in certain sacramental preparation (particularly marriage) and give guidance in the important and sensitive area of marriage annulment.

The Commission for Finance gives guidance and support to parishes in all areas concerned with their material resources and assets. The Commission sees it as especially important to help parishes in understanding and implementing the financial, health and safety and social legislation which affects religious bodies.

Appendix I

Pastoral Planning in our Diocese

Background

By the beginning of the 1990s, four clear trends were apparent in planning for the future.

- Population growth and large scale building development in most areas of our Diocese.
- Need to convey the message that our modern society was losing its previous religious and moral structure and that members of the Church had a more active role to play in witnessing to their faith in daily life.
- A deepening appreciation that collaborative ministry expressed an essential truth about the nature of the Church.
- Acceptance that the number of priests available to serve in parishes would diminish over the coming years.

The Bishop formed the Committee for Future Planning to consider the changes which might be necessary in light of these trends. The Diocesan Pastoral Council was also key in undertaking this process of future planning.

An important question was whether we could continue to sustain the existing number of Masses we had and whether the existing structures best served our

situation. After due consultation, certain Mass Centres were closed and Mass times in parishes were revised. A further step was to re-organise deanery boundaries so as to promote co-operation and sharing of responsibilities.

For a number of years, certain neighbouring parishes had started to share resources and to have one priest looking after two communities. In 2000, such an arrangement was formalised in the case of four parishes and they became 'linked'.

In September 2002, future planning was carried a stage further with a general overview of the whole Diocese and proposals for more extensive linking. Detailed consultation in parishes and deaneries followed. As a result (in July 2003) certain of those proposals were confirmed and some were modified. This consultation has also produced from local knowledge, suggestions for future areas of linking or shared resources.

Principles of Future Planning

The following guidelines and recommendations have governed the proposals.

- We will sustain and support, wherever it is possible, existing worshipping communities.
- We will plan for fewer, larger parishes in the Diocese, and for more parishes to be linked to share limited priestly and other resources.
- We will plan to have fewer Mass Centres as circumstances change.

- We will make support available to parish communities to help them in making the Vision a reality.

- We will encourage the appointment of Pastoral (Lay) Assistants in our parishes; for this purpose, the Bishop and the Vicars General, in conjunction with BRES, have prepared guidelines to clarify the role and responsibilities of PAs.

- We will encourage the appointment of a full-time or shared Parish Secretary and/or Parish Administrator to enable parishes to function effectively and to release priests from unnecessary administration.

Practical Consequences

As a result of the consultation in 2002 and an ongoing consultation through meetings of deanery conferences and of Pastoral Councils at parish, deanery and diocesan level, the following decisions have been made or questions raised.

South Essex Deanery

Since September 2003, the parishes of St Basil, Basildon, Holy Trinity, Basildon and St Therese, Laindon have been served by a Team Ministry. This Team is made up of one parish priest, one assistant priest, one Ursuline Sister and a deacon. The Team is working with the members of the three communities to discern the best way forward for supplying effective pastoral provision in the area.

In due course, Grays will be served by one priest. There will continue to be a priest at Tilbury and the two priests and

parishes will work together to meet the needs of the area. In due course, the parishes will be linked. The redevelopment along the Thames and the building of a new seafarers' centre will also be factors in assessing the needs of the area.

Southend Deanery

Rayleigh parish will be served by one priest. Hockley will become part of Rochford parish. Southend and Prittlewell parishes have become linked.

The implications of possible development at Southend Airport are to be considered.

Redbridge Deanery

The boundaries of SS Peter and Paul, Ilford to be redrawn so that St Aidan's School is included in Goodmayes parish.

The desirability of linking each of the following with a larger parish has been agreed:

- SS Mary Erconwald, Ilford Lane
- St John the Baptist, Ilford
- St John Vianney, Clayhall.

Consultations are underway to determine the exact configuration of the linkings and the time scale involved.

Waltham Forest Deanery

Sunday Mass at Whipps Cross Hospital to be retained while possible.

Mid Essex Deanery

The Mass Centre at Great Baddow has closed.

Our Lady Immaculate, Chelmsford and Holy Name, Chelmsford now share the same parish priest. At an appropriate time, the two parishes will become linked.

The long-term feasibility of having a resident priest at Burnham-on-Crouch needs to be addressed. Consultations about the alignment of the necessary linking are taking place with Maldon and Danbury/South Woodham Ferrers parishes.

Newham Deanery

The boundaries of Silvertown to be redrawn to include Britannia Village currently in Canning Town parish.

Colchester Deanery

At some stage in the future, St James the Less and St Helen, Colchester will be served by two priests. The boundaries of the parish will therefore be redrawn so that St Joseph, Mile End and St Helena Hospice become part of Greenstead parish.

Ministry at the Colchester Hospitals to be shared on a deanery basis.

St Francis of Assisi, Walton-on-Naze has been linked with Sacred Heart, Frinton. The church building at Walton has been closed.

Mass is no longer celebrated at Great Bentley. The Mass times in Brightlingsea and Wivenhoe have been changed.

Consultation to take place as to the possible linking of Frinton and Harwich.

Development of the container port at Harwich will need to be monitored.

The long-term feasibility of being able to celebrate Mass at Mistley has to be considered.

The shape of building development in North Colchester suggests that St Joseph's Mile End is not in the best location to serve the needs of that area.

Havering Deanery

At some stage in the future, St Dominic, Harold Hill to be linked with Holy Redeemer, Harold Hill.

English Martyrs, Hornchurch to be linked with St Joseph, Upminster (to enable this, St Joseph's will be served by two priests and St Mary's Hornchurch by one priest). The relocation of Oldchurch Hospital is however, a factor in determining the provision needed at St Mary's.

North Essex Deanery

The proposed development of Stansted Airport has major implications for the area.

The possibility of relocating the church premises at Dunmow is being considered.

The long-term feasibility of Great Bardfield continuing as a separate parish has to be considered.

The Mass Centre at Thaxted (currently served from Great Bardfield) will have to be served from another parish.

The question is being discussed of whether Old Harlow will serve the Mass Centre at Hatfield Broad Oak (currently served from Dunmow).

The Pallottine Fathers have indicated that, after the departure of the present priest at Halstead, it would be difficult for them to provide a replacement. The question of linking has therefore been raised.

West Essex Deanery

The possibility of having the Mass Centre at Hatfield Broad Oak (currently served from Dunmow) served from Old Harlow is being discussed.

The long-term feasibility of having a priest resident at Waltham Abbey needs to be addressed.

Brentwood Deanery

The future possible linking of Stock and Ingatestone needs to be considered.

The long-term feasibility of having a priest resident at Hutton needs to be addressed.

The long-term feasibility of having a resident priest at Ongar needs to be addressed.

Appendix II

The work and aims of the Diocesan Commissions

Liturgy Commission and Music Department

Liturgy is the Church's traditional name for 'worship'. It is therefore key to our lives as Christians. Liturgy is built upon relationships:- it is founded on our relationship with God but also involves us in a relationship with our neighbour. Liturgy involves praying to God and listening to God; it equally involves talking to each other about God.

The Liturgy Commission is concerned with the important questions of how we worship, when we worship, what we need to help us worship and the meaning of things we use in worship. To deal with all these aspects, the Commission is divided into groups of people who have some experience of these different areas of worship.

The obvious focus for our worship is the parish church and so we have a group whose members have knowledge and expertise about church building and decoration. This group is known as the Art, Architecture and Heritage Sub-Committee. Having gathered in the building, our worship is expressed through the celebration of Mass, baptisms, marriages and all the other liturgical rites. And so we need a group which is proficient in the ways of conducting these services to help our communities celebrate worthily and well. This group is known as the

Rites and Ministries Sub-Committee. An indispensable expression of worship is found through the music we use in worship and so a foundational part of the Commission is the Music Department, whose work is described below.

As part of good celebration, the Commission has the important task of ensuring sound formation for those involved in the Liturgy. And so the Rites and Ministries Sub-Committee offers courses of formation and renewal for those whose role it is to proclaim the Word of God, for those who have been invited to be Ministers of Holy Communion and for those who have been chosen to serve their community in the role of Pastoral Assistant. In the same way courses are offered for all Altar Servers. Within that ministry, the Commission also offers instruction and support for parish Masters of Ceremonies.

In those special circumstances when it is planned to build or re-order a church building, the members of the Art, Architecture and Heritage Sub-Committee meet with parish priests and parish pastoral councils to advise them on best practice, to help in the understanding of the principles which guide church building and layout, to advise them on the shape and form and architectural meaning of their church. The Committee also has much expertise in guiding the parish community towards the choice of an appropriate architect.

Our worship is also marked by special occasions such as ordinations, diocesan pilgrimages (Walsingham, Bradwell and Lourdes), events in the Cathedral or the funeral of a priest. There is a special group

whose task it is to make the necessary arrangements and this is the Diocesan Liturgy Planning Group.

The Documents of the Church give a special emphasis to the role of music in the Liturgy. 'Music fosters the unity of hearts, adds delight to prayer and solemnity to the Sacred Rites'. The aim of the Music Department is to ensure that music at every level fulfils its unique role. In doing this, the Music Department has a specific role within the Liturgy Commission but also has its own specific areas of competence.

A prime focus for the work of the Music Department is at the Cathedral. As Mother Church, it is required to be a centre of musical excellence, a source of musical training and an inspiration to the whole musical life of the Diocese. At the Cathedral itself, there are a large number of regular and special liturgies for which music must be provided by a number of choirs and groups, pre-eminent among whom is the Cathedral Choir, which over the years has established a reputation which is second to none.

Excellence in music is also desired by the parishes, schools and other communities of our Diocese and it is the role of the Music Department to support and guide them in achieving this desire. In particular, formation of cantors, singers, organists and instrumentalists is a major responsibility of the Department. Such formation as well as support for the musical ministries in parishes and schools is one of the chief tasks of the Diocesan Director of Liturgical Music.

By tradition, the Church Organ has a major role in liturgical music. It is also part of the function of the Music Department to encourage parishes to continue this tradition and to exercise responsibility for these instruments.

As well as specific areas, the Music Department has a general educative role of encouraging musical skills and of raising awareness of what constitutes quality in music. The Department also has important ecumenical links and responsibilities. This involves working closely with the Diocese of Chelmsford through its liturgies and music training and in particular through the Choirs' Festival and the joint Bishop' Church Music Awards.

Future planning for both the Liturgy Commission and the Music Department involves continuing and developing the activities and initiatives mentioned above. We are looking always to make good liturgy even better.

Our Vision for the Year 2010 is that formation for liturgy should have pride of place. Such formation should assist all members of our Diocese to appreciate and to have their lives moulded by the spiritual power which lies contained in our liturgical celebrations, that power being nothing less than God's own presence and the fullness of God's own love. It is the ideal which has up to now motivated us and will continue to do so. We would wish to achieve the recognition that Liturgy is a living art form; it is the beauty of God expressed in human terms.

Brentwood Diocesan Pastoral Council

Under general Canon Law, a diocesan pastoral council is a consultative body which exists 'to study and weigh those matters which concern the pastoral works in the diocese and to propose practical solutions concerning them'. This means that a diocesan pastoral council has a key role in advising and supporting the diocesan bishop and is an important expression of collaborative ministry. It was with this in mind that the Brentwood Diocesan Pastoral Council (BDPC) was established in the 1980s. The large majority of its members are the lay representatives of each parish, but it also includes the heads of the Diocesan Commissions, the Deans, the Vicars General and the Bishop.

The role of the Council includes acting as a forum for discussion and reference, promoting co-operation and communication between groups at all levels across the diocese, deaneries and parishes, and perhaps most significantly of all - supporting pastoral development and providing practical advice to the Bishop.

Of the four priority areas set by the Bishop, the Council is especially involved with Responsible Stewardship and Pastoral Planning. The work which is being currently undertaken (and which will be expanded in coming years) can be considered at diocesan, deanery and parish level.

In taking diocesan objectives up to 2010, future planning will be the major concern. There will inevitably be changes as a result of that planning and an essential part of our role is to support a smooth transition for the communities and groups involved.

Ongoing involvement and discussion with the Bishop and his Committee for Planning will be vital in ensuring this. The Council will also have an important relationship with the Diocesan Pastoral Team and acting as a link with external organisations that can offer help and support. This will be a period of significant change and re-evaluating pastoral priorities will be essential. The Council wishes to take a full part in that process and will continue to be a source of feedback for the Bishop, the Commissions and other dioceses.

In considering deanery objectives up to 2010, a major objective will be the establishment of effective Deanery Pastoral Councils and the sharing of agenda items with meetings of the clergy Deanery Conference. This is very much inspired by the theology and spirituality of communion which is encouraged by Pope John Paul II.

In terms of parish objectives up to 2010, the Council wishes to encourage the establishment of parish pastoral councils in those parish communities without one. It will be important for the Council to support new parish pastoral councils - and, just as much so, existing ones - through the period of transition which lies ahead. To achieve this, it will be essential to keep the work and activities of the Council relevant

to parish life. An important factor here will be improved communication between BDPC and parishes and the sharing of resources and information.

In terms of practical initiatives already undertaken, the BDPC has begun a pilot scheme of active prayer groups for vocations and for the young people of the Diocese. The Council takes seriously the need to encourage our young people and to foster a culture of vocation. In respect of collaborative ministry and a spirituality of communion, the Council has provided training and workshops to offer practical skills to those taking up parish or deanery roles. The Council is committed to expanding this programme as part of the ongoing support which it offers to parishes and deaneries.

Social Welfare Commission

The aims of the Commission are based on Christian concern and action on behalf of all those in the Diocese who have needs of a social, care nature. Its specific ministry lies in providing support and help to organisations and individuals who work with people in need of social care.

The Commission would wish to contribute to the Diocesan Vision by highlighting certain areas which have become important in recent years and which, between now and 2010, will need to be addressed effectively at diocesan, deanery and parish level.

Inclusivity has figured increasingly in modern society. At heart however, it is

actually a religious concept based upon the truth that we are all children of God and all of equal worth and value in God's sight. In terms of Church membership, we do well to recall the teaching about the common priesthood of all the baptised. This means that we are all entitled to participate in the Church's worship and other activities. It flows naturally from our Diocesan Vision that we should be a genuinely inclusive Church and that such an approach should be second nature to us.

There are a number of Social Care Agencies in the Diocese. A spirituality of communion implies that they should have a supportive network and means of mutual support to enable them to carry out their roles fruitfully.

The Catholic Church has a good tradition of social care policy and it is important that there is a sound basis to such policy. It should be our aim to contribute to the development of Catholic thinking in this field through active participation in Caritas - Social Action.

Social care policy will continue to occupy an important place in the Church. It is therefore crucial that the Bishop be offered the best advice on social care policy issues.

An important concern would be to promote Responsible Stewardship by providing opportunities for people to use their talents in the field of Social Care. The Commission is pledged to developing its relationship with parishes and deaneries so that networks of support can grow among the members of our Diocese who, through

their help to homeless people, refugees, people living with HIV/Aids and in countless other ways, are contributing to the Church's 'option for the poor'. Although we tend to think of the 'option for the poor' in terms of the developing nations, it is salutary to recall that it is just as relevant in our own country.

There will be an increasing importance to promote marriage and family care. A significant initiative was taken in this direction in a consultation day for families held at New Hall in September 2004. It focused on two things (1) challenges facing families today (2) How can parishes better support and strengthen marriage and family life? We will continue to build on all that came from that day and also to work in partnership with such bodies as Marriage Care and the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society.

Education Commission

The fundamental aim of the Diocesan Education Commission is the provision of a Catholic education for Catholics of statutory school age in a Catholic school. To achieve this, we provide support, encouragement, advice and guidance to school staff and governors, to parish priests and to parents. With the same aim in mind, we negotiate, on behalf of schools, with Local Education Authorities and central government agencies.

The Commission's work has to be sensitive to the needs of schools and parishes in relation to a wide range of

issues. Over the next few years, the following issues will need the particular attention of our Commission.

The Commission will continue to assist schools in their development of post-16 Provision and in the re-shaping of the 14-19 Curriculum.

Within the next three years, we shall be working with Governing Bodies to provide new Instruments of Government for our schools. We shall be working with Local Education Authorities towards co-ordinated admission arrangements in order to bring equity to the process of offering places to new pupils.

A significant aspect of pastoral planning been and will continue to be the linking of parishes. Such linking can have important consequences for the schools of parishes involved. As new relationships between schools and parishes develop in the light of parish linking, the Education Commission and the Brentwood Religious Education Service will be greatly involved in preparing for the practical implications of such new arrangements so as to give confidence to all parties concerned as to educational provision and potential for the future.

The proposed areas of building development in our Diocese - both in Essex and the London Boroughs - are very significant and will have considerable impact upon our life in the Diocese. From an educational point of view, it is the Commission's policy to ensure that, as far as possible, there are enough places to meet the new demand.

Brentwood Religious Education Service

One important aspect of the work of the Brentwood Religious Education Service (BRES) is to offer support, formation and encouragement to people who have or who are going to have a particular role, ministry or interest in our faith communities. Thus, one section of our Mission Statement reads: 'BRES serves the Kingdom of God in enabling the enablers to develop the growth in Faith, Knowledge and Understanding of God, in schools and parishes'.

In keeping with our Mission Statement, our focus between now and 2010 will be to continue to help individuals, parishes, schools and other groups to grow and develop in Faith and Mission. The main ways in which such help and support is given are Religious Education, Catechesis and Evangelisation. We shall continue to ensure that these remain on-going processes in our schools and parishes. Each of these communities will have their own needs over the coming years.

In the area of Schools, we will continue to offer development to teachers, parents and governors so that they may be supported in their contribution to the Church's Mission in education. To achieve this, our priorities will be twofold. First, we will help schools address the need for strategies for recruitment and retention of staff so as to meet the future needs of schools. Secondly, by a regular system of visits to schools, we shall seek to continue to maintain high standards of education in

our schools across all the key-stages and to maintain and develop the Catholicity of the schools, their staff and their pupils.

In the area of parishes, we have three major initiatives which we will continue to develop. The first is to provide formation and support for Pastoral Assistants. As parishes and communities adapt in the light of future pastoral needs and planning, there will be an increased potential for Pastoral Assistants. We will enable them to fulfil the roles which will arise as a result of the needs of developing parishes.

The second initiative is to provide on-going adult formation so that people may become more aware of their baptismal vocation. In the light of our Diocesan Vision, the need for such formation is self-evident and is a major priority. Our third initiative is that, in conjunction with other Commissions, we plan to provide developing catechesis and practice to help restore the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a living and regular experience in the life of every Catholic.

Brentwood Catholic Youth Service

Our Mission is to offer opportunities for young people to develop their relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ in their daily lives. Our Mission is thus very much in line with the Diocesan Vision of helping young people to lead lives which are founded on holiness and which enable them to take full part as baptised members of the Church. Our work in the Youth Service and

the opportunities we offer are distinctive from although complementary to the opportunities offered by schools and parishes.

It is our Vision as the Diocesan Youth Service that we will achieve our Mission by providing opportunities for young people to encounter Christ and to base their lives on Christ. We will make available a number of ways through which these opportunities may be taken up. And so we offer the facilities for young people to be trained as Youth Ministers; to participate in Residential Retreats; to experience Youth Ministry in their school or parish through outreach work; to feel the support and fellowship of other young people through special gatherings and celebrations; to experience a variety of pilgrimages.

It is important to acknowledge however the expertise which is offered by other relevant local and national agencies engaged in this field. And so it is also part of our Vision that we should collaborate with these agencies to provide resources for young people and indeed for those working with young people in Brentwood Diocese.

It is essential that the Brentwood Catholic Youth Service should also be supportive of those working at parish and local level. It is therefore part of our Vision that we will identify and develop structures to enable effective youth ministry with local groups across the Diocese.

To give effect to this Vision we have drawn up the following strategy. In the

short term we propose to develop a database of parish contacts; to develop closer links with secondary school chaplains by running retreat/training days for them; to implement the Bishop's strategy for all Commissions by visiting all those who work with young people on a deanery by deanery basis; to re-establish a Diocesan Youth Commission responsible for oversight and guidance of the Youth Service; to continue to reflect on the best location for Walsingham House; to evaluate the existing pilgrimage programme and to explore different destinations for Youth pilgrimages; to evaluate and update the Youth service website.

In the medium to long term we propose to establish an accredited training programme for Youth Ministers; to manage the re-location of Walsingham House (as appropriate); to develop the Walsingham House team to be strong enough in numbers to be able to offer outreach work co-ordinated with our residential retreat provision.

Commission for Ecumenism

The work of the Ecumenical Commission is based on the firm belief that we each have a responsibility 'to encourage and support one another for the spread of the Gospel and the building up of the Kingdom'. The outward-looking vision of the Second Vatican Council is that the Church is the expression of God's life and love and unity. This vision should be the inspiration for the Church's members in their turn to be outgoing.

The spirit of Vatican II requires us to dialogue with others, so that we grow in understanding. Since the heart of the Christian life is prayer, we are encouraged to join in prayer with other Christians and members of other faiths whenever possible. Since all Christians are called to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed, we should also join with others in works of practical co-operation, especially where this involves service to the poor and oppressed or where it gives expression to the values of peace, justice and reconciliation, for these are central to all mainstream faiths. In this way we will give common witness to God's values in our world.

This spirit of being out-going will shape our priorities. These would include taking every opportunity to work with members of other denominations, with members of other faiths and indeed with people who profess not to have a faith.

A further priority would be to accept our responsibilities to the communities in which we live and to be active in participating in the shaping of our communities for the common good.

Another vital priority is that we should be pro-active in our approach to others by going out to meet and work with them whenever possible, rather than wait for them to come to us.

In many areas of our Diocese, there is still population growth. This is to a large extent due to the considerable developments that are taking place and will continue in the future. This

development means new housing, new job opportunities and new challenges.

Furthermore, in new building developments there is usually a designated 'faith site'. This will be the opportunity for us to be part of the decision-making process as to how this faith-site should be developed. Equally it gives the possibility of sharing resources: human resources (e.g. chaplaincies) and buildings (e.g. churches, schools and halls).

It will be an important part of the work of our Commission to help our developing communities make the best use of these opportunities and possibilities.

Commission for Justice and Peace

Whilst acknowledging the advances which have been made in Brentwood Diocese over recent years, our Commission remains concerned that many people of the Diocese still see work for Justice and Peace as an optional extra for a few people in the Church.

For this reason, in setting priorities for the coming years, it will be essential to continue the animation and support of Justice and Peace work around the Diocese and to do this in the most effective way, given the resources at our disposal. The objective is to bring to the whole Diocese the message that work for Justice and Peace is not just a matter of choice but is integral to the Gospel message. Furthermore, it is important that this message takes root at parish and deanery

level. Like all other Commissions, we see closer working with parishes as essential. It is also important that those who work for Justice and Peace at diocesan level should be imbued with a spirit of mission and be trained in effective promotion of Justice and Peace issues and Mission.

Other main priorities over the coming years will be to address the following substantial concerns:

- There will be the need for detail consideration of the international situation in the aftermath of the War in Iraq and the consequences of the War against Terrorism. We need also to be alert to the likely reordering of the international order.

- The needs raised and addressed by the Diocesan Refugee Development Project will need close and careful monitoring.

- Through the project 'Celebrating Culture in Liturgy', the question of inclusive liturgies (and the associated work of anti-racism) has come to the fore. It is important that these matters should be carried forward.

- Our twinning with the Diocese of Dundee in South Africa has produced some good results and has been taken up by number of parishes. Ongoing Justice and Peace awareness requires that we should continually monitor this project and encourage its spread. Support for the Diocese of Dundee also entails commitment to the work on HIV/AIDS and the eradication of poverty in the area.

- The issues of Housing and Homelessness, Northern Ireland, Ethical Investment and racial Justice - all of which have been the subject of Commission Working Parties - will also be ongoing for the foreseeable future.

Chancery and Tribunal

Being a member of the church is not simply something spiritual. It carries with it rights and responsibilities and, being human, we need structures and a framework to support and enable our membership of the Church. Canon (or Church) Law helps provide such structures and framework.

As Pastor, the bishop is entrusted with the care of his people, and the responsibility to protect their rights through upholding justice and to ensure discipline and right order in the Church. The role of the Chancery and Tribunal is to help him carry out these responsibilities.

The principal role of the Chancellor is to ensure that all necessary official documents are properly prepared, transmitted and safeguarded. A considerable part of this role involves granting various dispensations and permissions in the name of the Bishop.

Another important aspect of the work of the Chancery is to offer advice on matters of Canon Law when requested.

Areas of priority for the Chancery over the next few years will be:

- offering education to both clergy and lay people on aspects of Canon Law in the life of the Church.

- providing advice on archive procedures, particularly in the light of the Data Protection Act and other legislation

- increasing accessibility of archive material at diocesan and parish level.

The Diocesan Tribunal acts as the judicial arm of the Bishop, enabling people to have their rights determined within the context of Church life. For the most part, the day to day work of the Tribunal concerns marriage nullity cases but increasingly other issues may be expected to come to the fore, both in the form of the rights of the faithful as members of the community of the Church, and in Child Protection issues.

Areas of priority for the Tribunal over the coming years will be:

- ensuring a continuing number of suitably trained personnel (both clergy and lay)

- reducing the time taken in processing marriage nullity cases, so that this may be closer to the one year envisaged by the Code of Canon Law

- increasing awareness of the work of the Tribunal at parish level

- working with the Diocesan Child Protection Team to ensure that diocesan procedures in this area comply with the Nolan Report and with the requirements of Canon Law.

Finance Commission

The Mission of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we carry out this Mission using human resources and the material resources of land, buildings etc. The use of these resources gives rise to practical, technical and legal issues. It is the role of the Finance Commission to offer support and guidance in these fields.

Our ownership of land, employment of people and use of financial assets is subject to English Law. Our Diocese therefore has to have a legal structure. It is in fact a registered charity - the Brentwood Diocesan Trust. The Diocese appoints a Finance Board which is responsible for overall management of all the business of the Trust.

The Commission advises on and implements the decisions of the Finance Board as well as undertaking much of the day-to-day business which arises. An important part of the Commission's work is to ensure compliance with Canon Law and English Law at diocesan and parish level.

Our Commission's priorities for the coming years will be to concentrate on best practice in terms of financial and budgetary management, compliance with legislation, and enabling our Diocesan Vision and the other needs of the Diocese to be met.

Our first objective is to assist parishes in the financial, practical and legal areas which are increasingly part of parish life. We would seek to achieve this objective in three ways.

- by the provision of ongoing support to parishes by our internal support/audit team in dealing with administrative and practical difficulties.

- by encouraging and working with parishes in meeting pastoral needs and particularly in the area of adult formation.

Our second objective is to implement a structured approach with parishes in managing regular property inspection, as well as monitoring parish maintenance and building projects.

Our third objective is to offer support at diocesan level. We will do this by helping to meet future needs and growth in the Diocese, recognising the special needs of the area of Education and of provision for Youth. We will also continue to facilitate the work and needs of the Commissions generally.

To achieve our objectives - particularly at parish level - certain administrative facilities would be helpful which would save time and increase efficiency. It would be beneficial to standardise computer software systems within parishes and compatibility with the Diocese for Gift Aid and parish accounting. Also beneficial would be for each parish to have a modem link to the Diocesan Finance Office to ensure assistance to parishes as needed and to assist with immediate transfer of data. Furthermore, efficiency would certainly be enhanced by electronic banking to include all transactions between parishes and the Diocese, together with the processing of salaries.