

# **DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD**

## **Bishop's Office**

Cathedral House  
Ingrave Road  
Brentwood Essex  
CM15 8AT



February 2016

My Dear People,

Moses addressed the people, “My father was a wandering Aramaean...” These words we heard in the first reading became a formula that the people regularly recited in the temple, a shared story, perhaps the oldest part of the Old Testament. It tells how the Lord accompanied his people on a journey and was always with them through change and challenge until he brought them to a new land.

This theme of the closeness of God is taken up in the second reading. “The word is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart.”

Discerning together the future of our diocese involves storytelling and listening. We need to listen to each other’s stories of how God has worked in our lives; and is still accompanying us. In sharing our stories we then begin to write together a new narrative.

Moses’ words united the people. He articulated what they all held in common, - Faith in God who had always been with them. Jesus, too, filled with the Holy Spirit, was led on a journey by the Spirit, through trials and temptations but he, like Moses, knew that God was with him.

Next year, 2017, our diocese will mark its 100th anniversary. We have a shared story, which we will be retelling in various ways as part of the celebrations. And like the people of God who have gone before us, we can’t stay still! Society and the world around us has changed; we have changed. The Gospel story stays the same but where and how we re-tell it brings new and exciting challenges.

After the Synod on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity some years ago Pope Saint John Paul II talked of the need to develop, “Dialogue and discernment... consultation and collaboration with the lay faithful, women and men”. The Diocesan Strategic Planning Group was formed last year to begin to address this.

Now we would like to appoint “Stewards of the Gospel”, one individual in each parish, who together with parishioners and local clergy, will listen to the people and then be part of the collaboration between clergy and laity in writing the next chapter of the story of the Diocese.

They will assess the resources available at local level in order to maximise opportunities for evangelisation and sacramental provision. The intention is that these individuals would volunteer their time and their talents to work closely with the clergy and parishes as part of the diocesan planning process. Comprehensive training and support will be made available to the Stewards in order to prepare them for their important role in their parishes.

What Will It Involve? The Stewards will:

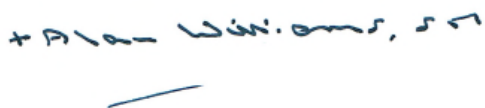
- Form a parish consultation group with the support of the Parish Priest - Listening to people’s stories
- Assess the resources of the parish in association with the consultation group and clergy
- Liaise with the diocesan planning group on the outcomes of the parish group meetings
- With the priest and people, form a vision and plan for the future of their parish, - the writing of the next chapter.

Who Should Volunteer? A job description is on the flyer inserted in your newsletter. If you meet most or all of the criteria and would like to know more, please speak to your Parish Priest.

We have just begun a wonderful “Season of great grace” and I wish you all a happy and holy Lent.

With all good wishes,

+ Alan Williams, SJ



Bishop of Brentwood

Let us say together the diocesan planning prayer which you have been given...