

A Vision for our Diocese of Brentwood 2019

Working Together To Evangelise Our Diocese

I have been appointed by Bishop Alan and the DSPG to help as Director of Development.

“Development” is a positive thing and my job is to direct it for you.

The Oxford Dictionary defines “Development” as:

The process of being developed

A specified state of growth or advancement

A new or advanced product or idea

An event constituting a new stage in a changing situation

I like all of those.

I like the idea that I am here to help a process to grow and advance our church,

To come up with new and advanced ideas for our church and that this appointment is an event that constitutes a new stage in our changing situation.

With your help and with the help of God I am going to be the Director of these positive things.

You will immediately notice that there is nothing negative in any of these definitions. There is nothing even “satisfactory” or “making do” about these words. They are all positive.

I am not here to facilitate a process of mediocrity or to make the best of a difficult situation. I am appointed to facilitate a positive process that leads to positive outcomes.

Let me to clarify where I think we start from.

I grew up in a small Lancashire village and there is an old joke about a man who pulls his car up next to an old country bumpkin sitting at the side of the road and asks how to get to Lancaster. He is met with the reply: "Well I wouldn't start from here that's for sure"

But the simple truth is that we must always start from right here right now. We have no choice in that and my view is that "right here and right now" is a pretty good place to be.

We live in a fantastic part of one of the richest countries on earth in a time when our life expectancy is longer than ever before. If you look around you today you will see that you are blessed to be in the company of a lot of really good people and the same applies in your parishes.

We worship in a diocese served by wonderful priests and people and where we already do things well.

Our pretty good place is by no means perfect of course and it can be improved in all sorts of ways.

Nonetheless it is a pretty good place to start and there is no better time than right now.

As you will have realised by now I am an optimist. Not only do I believe that we are in a pretty good place but I also believe that everything man made can always be improved upon. Everything that is already good can be made better.

I believe that we have all the resources that we need to spread the Gospel message across Essex and East London. I believe that we have all the people we need, all the money we need and all the buildings we need. We just need to use them better.

If I go back to the dictionary definitions I used earlier I believe we are now at a critical moment in our history and that this initiative of the Stewards of the Gospel and the appointment of a Director of Development constitutes a new stage in our changing situation.

My optimism goes as far as saying that I think change is not only necessary but that it is both good and a fact of life. To those people who think that the status quo is the best place to be my response is that the status quo is merely the temporary state of affairs where change has got us to at any one specific moment in time.

In business people say that the only constant is change and in the history of Christianity and the Catholic Church change has been a continual fact of life.

Jesus did not come into the world to maintain the status quo He came into the world to change things, to turn the world upside down.

St Paul spent a lot of his energy trying to get people to change their ideas, ways of life and church life,

A thousand years after Christ came among us the Great schism saw the relationship between the Eastern and Western church change dramatically,

500 years ago Martin Luther and others triggered the Reformation that changed things dramatically.

In 1850 the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy in England by Pope [Pius IX](#), was followed by a frenzy of anti-Catholic feeling.

In the early days of my life the second Vatican Council flung the windows wide open and our church changed again.

My point is that change has always been the state in which our church exists

BUT

God has always been with us, has always loved us and always invites us to love Him and our neighbour.

One hundred years ago the structure of the Church in Essex changed dramatically when the Archdiocese of Westminster was divided and the Diocese of Brentwood was erected.

That was a big deal. It was a huge and rather controversial change but it is what we take for granted as the normal way of things in 2017.

So this year we celebrate 100 years of the Diocese of Brentwood and for me that centenary celebration also marks the beginning of the next 100 years. There are about a quarter of a million Catholics in our diocese and every week about one in five of those people are in church celebrating Mass.

This is the church of 2017.

We are the church of 2017 in East London and Essex.

We are the people on whom the responsibility falls to develop our church for the next 100 years so that more people can hear the Gospel message and more souls can be saved.

As an optimist I am in good company because my optimism is shared by Pope Francis.

In E.G. he says:

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus and he wishes to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy.

He talks about how ***the risen Christ sent his followers to preach the Gospel in every time and place, so that faith in him might spread to every corner of the earth.***

Today that is our responsibility. To preach the Gospel in East London and Essex in the 21st Century.

He tells us ***The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy***

Today that is our joy if we want it.

Pope Francis ***dreams of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself.***

Today that is our missionary option and it is one that we must take up. It is our responsibility to transform ourselves and our parishes and ultimately to transform East London and Essex.

Pope Francis goes on to say that:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.

So when people ask me where do we start from I think this is a pretty good place. As you can see from looking around this room no one is walking alone, everyone is relying on everyone else as brothers and sisters under the leadership of our Bishop Alan who has

specifically asked every one of us to join with him in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.

If we are to be wise that does not mean that we must be blindly optimistic.

We must not look away from the things that interfere with our missionary option, our joy or our new chapter of evangelisation. We must confront them head on we must tackle every potential impediment to our development, as the Holy Fr says:

Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!

So.. I will try to be your Director of Development adhering to this spirit of realistic optimism and joy, overcoming challenges as they present themselves.

I will look at everything afresh and I will facilitate a time of discernment, decision making and change for our Diocese, as we seek to make best use of our resources to spread the Gospel and to offer the best possible pastoral support to Catholics across Essex and East London.

My role will involve the design and management of a diocesan change plan involving clergy, lay people and other stakeholders. We will look at everything afresh. Everything we do, everything we have and everything we are.

The Holy Fr must be right when he tells us ***that the renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented.*** That must mean everything and everyone, so together we will look to renew all of our structures with a view to making ourselves more mission oriented, more fit for purpose and as good as we can possibly be in our service of God. Everyone and everything can change and I ask you all to join me on a pilgrimage towards the changes demanded by pastoral conversion.

On a daily basis I will always try to heed Bishop Alan's recurring message that we must put God firmly at the centre of all that we do and use prayer as the basis of everything. Whenever it looks like I am failing in this..... and it will.... please help me.

So

Together we will find all the resources that we need,

Together we will release all the gifts of the Spirit that we possibly can and

And we will do it boldly, generously, courageously and without inhibition or fear; trusting in the Grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit and

Together we will be working towards that missionary impulse capable of transforming everything in our diocese. Together we will work to evangelise our diocese.

One of the reasons for my optimism is you.

You gathered here today is a demonstration that we are already developing. We are already changing. Bishop Alan has set us on our path of discernment and we have been provided with a formation process that makes the Stewards of the Gospel a unique and impressive group of people in a new and exciting relationship with our Priests.

Today we are a rich blend of Priests and Laity walking together in a new stage in a changing situation. We all have different talents and gifts and when we engage in a fruitful dialogue and work together guided by the Holy Spirit we can do almost anything. If that is not a cause for optimism then I don't know what is.

The stewards have learned about the life of a priest from Fr Paul Keane about how he is there to teach us and help us to be holy and how he will lead us as a shepherd who cares for us. We also heard him say that a priest should always feel at home in his community and that clearly places obligations on every one of us to ensure that he does truly feel at home. Later today we will work together to see how clergy and laity can complement each other to achieve the best results. How can we make the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

We heard Michael L'Estrange tell us about Canon Law and how it is ultimately there to ensure the Salvation of Souls. How we organise ourselves in dioceses and parishes gives the most immediate and visible expression of our ecclesial lives. We as parishes is how we are seen locally. We are the visible expression of our church and our faith.

We learned about the need to evangelise and we were told that because we like to feel comfortable in our parishes we often are prepared to accept second best but that if we do not change we will fail to be evangelisers. Later today we will work together to explore ways in which we might better evangelise our diocese.

We learned about practical ways that parishes can connect with the local community in new ways, how we can care for one another better and how we can share the Gospel Message.

We learned from Clare Ward the marvellous simple truth learned from Pope Francis that all we really need to do is the simple things but to do them joyfully, do them well and do them with love. It's not rocket science that requires experts: it just needs us.

And we heard from Michelle Moran about how right here right now is the time for our church to call upon every Christian community to evaluate their pastoral practice on the basis of the missionary character of what we do. She was very clear that business as usual

can no longer be the case in just the same way as Pope Francis has urged us not to say “we have always done it that way”.

I know that not everyone is as enthusiastic about change as I am.

I know that for some, “change” is a scary word leading to a very scary place where the unknown lives.

I know that everyone has different responses to the idea of change, to the process of change and to the results of change.

Some of you in this room have probably already decided that my attitude to change is not the same as yours. I understand that.

Change is a process and as a catholic community we are effectively on a pilgrimage through that process to a place that we do not yet know.

We are on that pilgrimage together.

When we start from right here and right now we will go at different speeds and we will go with different ideas in our heads and different prayers, hopes and fears in our hearts.

We must go together; we must keep everyone with us on our pilgrimage.

We must not lose our sisters and brothers along the way. No one should travel alone.

So we will travel together and care for and love one another.

Even when we disagree.... and we will We must travel together, pray together and overcome challenges together.

Even when we have to make difficult decisions.... and we will... we must travel together and support each other.

I will first of all listen to all of you, Priests Deacons and Stewards of the Gospel.

I will listen to what you have to say as Stewards of the Gospel. I know you have worked hard in your parishes and across parish boundaries to find new understandings of who and what and where we are right here right now.

In my first days at work I will go through the results of your hard work prayerfully, carefully, and respectfully.

I believe that the full outcome of that work must be heard, must be listened to and must be borne in mind as we step out on our pilgrimage. I will analyse the full detail of your responses to the questionnaires. I will read every one. I will feed back to you broad

principles or trends that come out of them. I will not tell you what you have just told us but I will share information around and I will use what you have to say as an important part of the process going forward.

Everyone will be heard and listened to and everyone will be taken seriously.

I will listen to what you have to say as priests and deacons.

I will invite you to tell me your thoughts, your hopes and aspirations, your fears and concerns.

I will listen to what you have to say and I will bear it in mind as we support each other at the start of our journey.

I will go through the results of that process of enquiry with equal care, prayer and respect.

Once I have done these things and conferred with the Bishop, his council and the DSPG I will tell you in some detail how I think we should move forward together and then we will look at the direction of travel together to map out our journey.

We will discuss that together later on in the year but right from the word go we will begin to implement some practicalities that will enable parishes to grow in the ways that they work together to evangelise our diocese and how they organise themselves.

The Stewards of the Gospel and the Clergy are both valuable and valued parts of this process and I will want to keep your contribution to the forefront of this work.

No one must walk alone on this pilgrimage and that most definitely includes me. I need the combined wisdom in this room and beyond. I am pretty sure I will need a lot of prayerful support and I will give you mine.

I will arrange future meetings in the next few weeks and they will begin to look at some of the immediate and practical ideas that are brought forward.

Please bear in mind that I have not yet started work formally but that said my intention is that the following timetable will be implemented.

10th April 2017 is my official start date.

13th April 2017 is the date by which you have all been asked to submit your responses to the questionnaires.

Easter

By 19th May I will have reviewed and analysed all the Responses and made some ***Preliminary Observations.***

I will separately provide feedback at this point and I invite you to organise parish or even multi parish meetings in late May or early June to consider that feedback.

By mid June

- a) I will have discussed my Preliminary Observations with the Bishop's Council and the DSPG and modified them.

and

- b) We will produce some materials relating to resources and training and practical ideas that can be started as soon as possible.

By end June we will meet again as Stewards and Priests to discuss practical ideas that can begin to be put into operation across our diocese right away to work together to evangelise our diocese.

By mid July I will prepare a confidential ***Draft Working Plan*** for our Diocese towards fulfilling our Vision for Bishop Alan, his Council and the DSPG.

By end July I will write to ask Stewards and Priests for their opinions (based on feedback from parishioners) on some of the issues that arise from the draft working plan. For clarity I do not intend to share the whole plan at that point but to sound out some ideas that have come up.

By end September we will meet again to discuss those questions and ideas.

By early November I will finalise what I am currently calling the ***First Consultation Proposal*** together with the Bishop's Council and the DSPG. This will be based on the draft working plan and the discussions we will have. It will set out a short, medium and long (25 years) macro plan for our whole diocese and will refer to many micro plans for individual parts of our diocese.

It is my intention to publish this **First Consultation Proposal** in the week between **Christ the King and the First Sunday of Advent 2017**.

I will ask every parishioner to read the **First Consultation Proposal** and pray about the contents and then after Christmas meet as a parish to discuss it and present us with

feedback before this time next year. I invite parishes to arrange dates for those meetings right now.

At end of February 2018 we will come together again to discuss the First Consultation Proposal.

During Spring and Summer 2018 together with the Bishop and the Bishop's Council we will transform the **First Consultation Proposal** into a ***Formal Proposal for our Diocese***.

We will meet again in the **Autumn of 2018** to discuss that **Formal Proposal for our Diocese** and in **the week between Christ the King and the First Sunday of Advent 2018** we will publish an amended final version of the proposal as ***The Vision for the Diocese of Brentwood 2019***.

In 2019 we will start to implement the Vision.

In this way we will work out together the best way to use all of the many resources that we have to best proclaim the Gospel message in Essex and East London and to provide the best pastoral care for each other.

I will work with you and for you to the best of my ability to help in that development so that

We will work together to evangelise our diocese.

Thank you.