



Working Together To Evangelise Our Diocese

Analysis of the Questionnaire

I sincerely hope that you have enjoyed a good Triduum and I wish you a Happy Easter and hope that this finds you filled with the Joy of The Risen Christ.

Thank you to everyone who has sent in their Responses to the Questionnaire. I know that some are still on their way and it would help greatly if they could arrive next week. Now it is time to start reading them and for us to listen to what you have said. In readiness for that I looked again at the Questionnaire and I thought I would take this opportunity to share some thoughts with you and I invite you to share them with your priest and others in your parish.

It is impossible to read the Questionnaire without getting a sense of movement. It is very clear that this Questionnaire is being used to look at how we might get from where we are to where we are going. Things are obviously going to be different for us all in the future.

Pope Francis helps us answer the question; “Where are we going?” He tells us that “Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel”

I know that many people do not like leaving their comfort zone but we are all missionaries within our local population, disciples among all the residents in our neighbourhood. We are all together on a pilgrimage from our own comfort zone to somewhere that enables us to better evangelise our diocese and provide pastoral care and the sacraments for everyone in it.

Extracts from the Questionnaire

The following are all quotes from the text of the Questionnaire with highlighting provided by me after the event:

- This questionnaire provides a framework for each parish community in the Diocese to explore its vitality and **future direction**
- The prayer, consultation and reflection **that lead to** your responses are of central importance to this whole process;
- **Part C – Our Community’s Initial Thoughts and Ideas about the Future – where your parish community is asked to provide its first thoughts about **how it might move forward.****

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- There is something exciting about being a disciple, an ‘apprentice’ of Jesus. There is so much to learn and discover. Jesus **walked around** the countryside with his followers, both women and men; they were a community, **a community on the move**. The disciples were formed and shaped within this community
- They were totally taken over by the Holy Spirit and began their work as missionaries; they are **instructed to go out into the world** and proclaim the Gospel
- We live in a very different world today. But as a result of our Baptism, we are called, **gifted and sent**. **We too are sent** into the world. We are missionaries within our local population, disciples among all the residents in our neighbourhood
- The local priest looks after the flock. We are immersed in the world; and we engage with each other, with those hurt by the Church, those separated from the Church for whatever reason and those beyond the institution of the Church. Every one of us has a particular **pathway of discipleship to follow**, and many of us discover it through the communities within which we live
- It is also true that we all **need to explore** how God is calling us to make a difference in the world we live in
- Pope Francis gives us clear guidance when he says in *Evangelii Gaudium* (para 20): Each Christian and every community **must discern the path that the Lord points out**, but all of us are asked to **obey his call to go forth** from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel”.
- Based upon the wide consultation and reflection that has taken place in completing parts A and B of this questionnaire, please use this section to provide an indication of your parish community’s **initial thoughts about its future**.

It also strikes me that there is an often repeated phrase in the questionnaire that must be remembered. It stands out and will have resonated with you as you completed it.

- If it is to **flourish, a community** needs a core of members who are committed to the Gospel of Christ and are willing to make the community a priority, giving generously of their time, imagination, gifts and other resources
- A **flourishing community** has worship at the centre of its life
- A **flourishing community** will be able to show that the Catholic faith is handed on to children, young people and adults by means of regular programmes of religious education and Christian Formation
- A **flourishing community** extends a spirit of hospitality and invites people to become members

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- A **flourishing community** needs good facilities which need to be well maintained
- A **flourishing community** may be influenced by its location. The proximity of neighbouring parishes can have a real impact on the vibrancy of a community.
- how we can enable **communities to flourish** in order for us to deepen our sense of discipleship and service. Our parish churches are not private chapels maintained simply because the community has enough money to cover the expense

It is with these thoughts in mind and with care and prayer that we will explore the responses to the questionnaires that have themselves been compiled with such care and prayer.

This is not a formulaic exercise. It concerns relationships between people and between people and God. Those things do not lend themselves to being decided by an algorithm or a formula. We will look at the whole picture and determine the best path for our pilgrimage to take as we move from our comfort zone to the place where our new flourishing communities can best share the Gospel message, provide pastoral care for one another and ensure Sacramental provision across our Diocese.

The Baptiser

At the Mass of Chrism Bishop Alan received the folder containing summaries from our parishes and he urged the Stewards of the Gospel to adopt St John the Baptist as their saint. He called him by his “nickname” – “the Baptiser”.

The Baptiser always knew that his mission was to go before Jesus and prepare the way for Him. He also knew that the time would come when he would need to fade into the background and allow Jesus His rightful place. He demonstrated wisdom, considerable grace and humility when he used the words that Bishop Alan referred us to: “He must increase, but I must decrease”

John understood his place in the story and he was perfectly comfortable with it. He knew that he was baptising with water but that He who is coming after would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. The Baptiser had no pretensions of greater glory than the coming Christ. “He must increase, but I must decrease” reflects a mindset of complete humility in the face of one greater.

Furthermore, the Baptiser shows that passing the torch is natural—yet still requires humility. “He must increase, but I must decrease” is the thought of each passing generation of God’s leaders who are looking to the future of Christ’s cause.

We should never think that the need for a new generation to take the reins of leadership in God’s work means that relinquishing those reins is easy for a generation accustomed to them!

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We desperately need the humility to say that we are not as important as the fate of a local church, or the development of leaders in worship and preaching, or the confidence of young believers. Let us promote and encourage them, acknowledging that they must increase, and I must decrease.

The Baptist reminds us that the Gospel is more important than any one person and he knew that his part in the story was for him to step aside for Jesus. The Baptist giving way to Jesus allowed Jesus to say, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he".

The Gospel can make us greater than we could ever be on our own—and John's stepping aside allowed that gospel to come in its full power. We may advance the Gospel, or detract from its advance—yet it remains far bigger than we are!

Things will go quiet now while we read and analyse but I will be in touch further in the second half of May with some Preliminary Observations and please do not forget to arrange a meeting to consider them in your parish.

You may be interested to know that there is a new Development Section of the website to complement that of Evangelisation. It is at

<http://www.dioceseofbrentwood.net/departments/development/>

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Easter 2017

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