



## **Working Together To Evangelise Our Diocese**

### **An aid to thinking about possibilities**

This document contains four scenarios. They are published at a time when parishes are being asked to meet with each other to discuss the First Formal Proposal for the Renewal and Restructuring of Our Diocese.

These scenarios are all made up. They are offered as an aid to discussion for your parishes. They are examples of some (but by no means all) of the possibilities that exist for us as we consider the future of our Church.

These scenarios are not intended as blueprints for what might happen in your parish.

Almost every detail of every scenario could be varied, mixed up or added to. Mass times could be changed to include (for example) Sunday evening Masses.

These scenarios are offered merely as ideas. Ideas that might lead to prayers and discussions that might in turn lead to the right response being found by parishioners for the evangelisation of their area - responses that can then assist Bishop Alan to make final decisions.

These scenarios can be read in conjunction with the Rough Guide to Canon Law.

### **Scenario 1**

The two parishes of St Alban and St Bartholomew are next to each other geographically sharing a common border.

Each parish has its own church, a hall and a presbytery. All of the buildings could do with a bit of love and attention.

There is currently a priest in each parish. There is a primary school next to St Alban's church but there is no secondary school in either parish. The nearest secondary school is at St Cuthbert which has a common boundary with both St Alban and St Bartholomew.

St Alban parish has relatively low levels of giving and a below average record on recovering gift aid. It has no assets and little prospect of raising the money to do anything substantial to improve the state of repair of any of the buildings. The church is not particularly warm in winter. It has three Masses at weekend: 5.30pm on Saturday and at 09.00 and 11.00 on Sunday.



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There is also daily Mass every day because the priest does not take a full day off during the week. The church holds 250 people and total Mass attendance at weekends is 400. The 11.00 Mass is a very popular family service with a really vibrant choir and music group. The church is fairly full for the 11.00 Mass.

St Bartholomew has good levels of giving and an excellent record on recovery of gift aid. It has a property that it lets out to raise money for the parish in order to keep the buildings in decent repair and it also employs a youth worker. Although all properties could benefit from more improvements the church is well heated and in decent repair. It has three Masses at weekends. Saturday evening at 6pm and Sunday morning at 08.30 and 10.00. There is daily Mass three mornings a week and two evenings during the week. The church holds 300 people and total weekend Mass attendance is 450. There is no music group or choir of any note in St B. All three Masses are fairly evenly attended.

The parishes of St A and St B decide that they would like to merge because they can see scope for a joint parish to become more missionary and they have a plan to do so. They also recognise that the diocese has a diminishing number of priests and having looked at themselves they believe that if they merge they can manage very well with one priest between them. They also think that they can ensure that their priest will be happy, welcome and fruitful in the new parish.

They decide that rather than link together they would like to go for a complete merger and pool all of their resources.

The new parish will be called Our Lady of Lourdes Parish. Both existing churches will remain in use with a new Mass Rota that enables one priest to comfortably serve both. The PPCs of both existing parishes agree that people will be encouraged to go to Mass at a time that suits them rather than at a church that they've been used to going to and that for the first year everyone will make a real effort to integrate and get to know new fellow parishioners.

On Saturday evening Mass will be at 5.30pm at St A and at 7pm at St B.

On Sunday morning Mass will be at 08.30 at St B and at 11.00 at St A.

There will be Mass on alternate days during the week on Monday St A, Tuesday St B, Wednesday St A and Thursday St B.

There will be no Mass on Friday because that is the priest's day off and everyone now recognises how important it is for a priest to have a full day off every week. Instead, on a Friday morning there is a service of the Word and a bible study group that meets after it (but no Communion).



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The parishioners have decided that the church hall in St A is in such a poor state of repair that they would rather sell it to a developer. It is on a good site and the money from the sale is to be used to renovate the church hall at St B, the two presbyteries and anything left over will go to essential repairs to the two churches.

Once it is renovated the presbytery at St B is going to be rented out for a profit. It is agreed that in the short term the rental income will be used:

- a) Keep both presbyteries in good order
- b) To make both churches as beautiful and as comfortable as possible.

Parishioners decide that everyone will look to improve their levels of giving to the new parish if they can and that they will ensure that every penny of gift aid is recovered.

Being freed up from looking after one rather run down church hall and having provided for the upkeep of other properties in the parish, they recognise that with even slightly increased offertory income they can have a full time and properly paid parish administrator instead of the two very part time and underpaid people they currently have. They will also be able to do more mission orientated work. They have a dream that every weekend Mass will be a full church in the not too distant future.

The St A music group/choir has agreed to help parishioners in St B get their own choir/music group off the ground and Thursday night is to become a fun, informal music night in the church hall at St B followed by various parish socials most weeks. Although everyone is conscious of the need to use the renovated hall for the benefit of the wider local community they want to balance the money making potential with the need for the parish to come together as a church community that worships, works and socialises together.

The youth worker from St B already does a little work in the primary school at St A but he will now work right across the new parish and link in with the secondary school at St Cuthbert. Friday evening is to become the social night for young people in the parish hall with a variety of events (films & pizza, sports, guest speakers, relaxed informal nights, Caritas projects). The first major event for the new parish is to be a big celebration Mass of thanksgiving for the two existing parishes of St Alban and St Bartholomew and for the merger into the new parish of Our Lady of Lourdes. Then they will appoint one new PPC for the new parish and commit to doing a parish mission.

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Questions for prayer and discussion:

- a) Can you see anything in this scenario that might be helpful to your parish?
- b) Can you use anything from this scenario to help with your discussions with your neighbouring parishes?
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### Scenario 2

The parish of St James is next to the parish of The Holy Family. St Ignatius is close by and shares a boundary with The Holy Family but not with St James.

The Holy Family High School is a well-regarded large secondary school with a high proportion of Catholic children who come from all three parishes and others close by. It is very close to the Holy Family church. St Anne's Primary School is also within the parish boundary of The Holy Family.

St James' parish also has a primary school of the same name and within the parish is Busyville University Hospital.

St Ignatius has a primary school of the same name.

All three parishes have a church, a hall and a presbytery. All properties could do with a little love and attention.

Both St James and The Holy Family churches are big and have weekend Mass attendance of around 900 each. They are in a densely populated area and are not geographically very big. It is possible to walk right across both parishes in 40 minutes if you are able bodied and wanted to! St Ignatius is a much smaller parish in numerical terms with a weekend Mass attendance of around 450.

They are all in an area where public transport is good.

The parishes have historically been home to different traditions.

St James' church seats 400 and has four Masses at the weekend: Saturday evening at 6.30pm; Sunday morning at 08.30 and 10.30 and Sunday evening at 6.30pm.

The Holy Family seats 500 and has three Masses: Sunday evening at 6.00pm and Sunday at 9.00 and 11.00.

St Ignatius seats 250 and has three Masses: Saturday evening at 6pm and Sunday morning at 9.00 and 10.30.



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All three parishes would like to keep their own identity at the moment. There is no desire to merge and even linking together is viewed with suspicion. However, having been asked to consider how they might manage with fewer priests, they have had meetings together over a period of time and recognise that there is good sense in working together to evangelise the area. They all agree that maintaining things as they are is not enough. They need to become more mission oriented and are keen to get on with it together.

The solution that these three parishes have suggested is that they share two priests between them. The two priests will live together in the presbytery at The Holy Family and will serve all three churches as separate parishes but on a new Mass rota.

Saturday evening: 5.30 at St James and 6.30 at St Ignatius.

Sunday morning:       08.30 and 10.30 at St James  
                                  09.00 and 11.00 at The Holy Family

Weekday Mass will be said every day with two at each church but one of the Holy Family weekday masses will be in the secondary school. The two priests will have separate days off. Because (at least in the short term) there is no appetite to join together, these parishes are all going to keep their own PPC and Finance Committee and be responsible for their own finances.

This is going to involve some careful organisation and because of this they have each agreed that one full time director (a lay person) should be employed to look after the temporal or secular affairs of all three parishes and to assist the two priests. That person will be paid for in agreed proportions by each parish. In the same agreed proportions the parishes will contribute to the remuneration of the two priests. Each parish will continue to be responsible for the maintenance of their own buildings in the short term. Neither St James nor St Ignatius will need a presbytery for a priest to live in and so both are going to let out their presbyteries on Assured Shorthold Tenancies and they will each contribute a monthly sum to The Holy Family recognising that it is housing their priests as well as its own. Thus the three parishes will effectively set up a partnership for their joint finances and also keep their own separately. The priests will share responsibility for the schools and the hospital ministry but will work with lay people to get more lay involvement over time.

The three parish communities have committed to working together over the next few years with a view to determining how they might become more closely integrated over time or indeed if they would rather stay as they are under this short term agreement. They have asked the Diocesan Director of Development to assist with this process and the Bishop has agreed that this should happen.



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They have also committed to establish a joint pastoral care team and evangelisation team to reach out to spread the Gospel message in their area.

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### **Scenario 3**

The parishes of:

- 1) St Gregory
- 2) St George
- 3) St Joseph
- 4) St John

are all in a rural area. They are separated by relatively long distances.

In the middle of the area is St George which is in the centre of the old market town of Great Twitchingford and there is a separate Mass centre in Little Twitchingford for a relatively tiny hamlet community.

The other three parishes are fairly small.

St John in Upper Masham also has a separate Mass centre in Lower Masham. Both St John and the church in Lower Masham are in a poor state of repair as are the presbytery and the church hall.

Apart from St Joseph in Great Rochburgh, which is immaculately maintained and is in a conservation area, the other churches, halls and presbyteries are all in need of TLC.

There is one Catholic primary school in Great Twitchingford but otherwise there are no Catholic schools in the area. Many children are unable to access a Catholic school education. Currently all four parishes have their own parish priest.

The overall population in this area is growing rapidly as the villages/ towns are developed to provide more housing to meet demand. Mass attendance has held up well over recent years



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and even grown a little in the last couple. However, the average age of parishioners is pretty high and there are not many young families in the area.

Public transport is not great between the villages/town and this is especially the case on Sunday.

A group of parishioners have been talking to the Stewards of the Gospel from these four parishes. They come from different parishes but they are professional people with very handy skills.

They recognise that to repair all the church halls is going to be expensive. However, this would be essential expenditure in order to make them viable public venues that can be hired out and be comfortable for users.

Similarly, three of the four presbyteries need considerable amounts to be spent on them to make them properly fit for a priest or a tenant to live in.

These people have identified a site almost in the centre of the four parishes. It is out of the village it is nearest to but enquiries have led people to believe that planning could be obtained for a brand new, comfortable, beautiful, eco friendly, accessible and cheap to run church with a hall and a car park. There is even the possibility that a new school could be negotiated. They have produced a plan showing that sale of the existing presbyteries and halls would more than pay for the new build. They have presented it to the Stewards of the Gospel who are impressed and it is gaining support from across the area.

The new church would not be in walking distance for many people but a survey of local parishioners has shown that only about 10% walk to their existing church in any event. None of the churches would need to be closed in order to make this plan viable in a financial sense but over time parishioners can see that it would make little sense to keep them open if a priest based in the new church could serve all the existing parishioners and more besides. A local taxi firm run by a parishioner is pretty quiet on a Sunday morning and has agreed to do discounted rates for groups of parishioners going to church. This, combined with a car pooling scheme, should make it feasible for everyone to get to church.

There is an interim plan that allows two priests to live in the well-maintained presbytery in Gt Rochburgh and to say Mass on a rota around the four parishes while the new church plan is brought to fruition. An option has been purchased on the land and planning permission is being applied for.

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### **Scenario 4**

A group of four rural and semi-rural parishes have met together to look at their future.

- 1) Our Lady of Good Counsel is the largest and most central parish with a beautiful church and a well maintained presbytery and church hall with a decent car park.
- 2) Our Lady of Lourdes
- 3) Our Lady of Light and
- 4) Our Lady and All Saints

These parishes all have a primary school and all are in easy distance of the largest Catholic secondary school in the area and quite easy access to two other Catholic secondary schools. All four parishes have agreed that they have no interest in being a part of a larger parish or a "Super-Parish". They all agree that they want to remain as stand-alone parishes. They all currently have quite small congregations.

It is recognised that in theory everyone who goes to all of the churches on a Sunday could sit in the same church all together. However, they see a significant role for themselves in their respective local communities. They are heavily involved in Churches Together and, both as individuals and parishes, they play a key role in the wider community.

As a result the four parishes have come up with a suggestion that they have all declared themselves in favour of.

The biggest of these small parishes happens to be the most central and has a well maintained presbytery and a church that could theoretically hold all the parishioners from all four parishes over a weekend. It also has a good car park. This is where the priest will live and he will serve all four parishes.

The Mass rota they are proposing is:

18.30 Saturday evening: A rota of Masses for churches. Each week a different church (except Our Lady of Good Counsel) will have a Mass at this time on a rota of 2-3-4-2-3-4-2-3-4 etc

09.00 Sunday morning: Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel (1)





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11.00 Sunday morning: A rota of Masses for churches 3-4-2-3-4-2-3-4-2 etc

Initially objections were raised to this on the basis that it did not provide a Mass every week for parishes 2), 3) and 4) but this was felt to be a price worth paying for the ability to keep their independence. Following discussions it has been realised that a car pooling scheme in each parish will enable parishioners to get to either Sunday Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel or one of the others. There is a feeling that this will help with building community spirit as well. Parishioners at Our Lady of Good Counsel are going to reserve six parking spaces close to the church door for parishioners travelling together from the other three parishes as a gesture of welcome and the reading rota will be organised to include a parishioner from 2, 3 or 4 on the week when that parish has no Mass.

Every parish already has a good group of lay leaders and one also has a deacon. The deacon has kindly agreed to work across all four parishes and the lay leaders have a good plan to help make the priest's life as easy as it possibly can be.

Although there will be four PPCs and four FCs, the agendas and frequency of the meetings are being arranged carefully and it is not anticipated that the PP will attend more than a quarter of them. The priest will get a short executive summary of every meeting.

Furthermore, each parish has committed to promote governor training so that there is always a good number of people available to fill the chair and vice chair if called upon. The PP can thus focus on being in the school and a support to the head teacher rather than in meetings. They are also committed to promote evangelisation across the area and to find new ways to welcome new people into events at their hall and services in their church.

Weekday Masses will rotate around the churches and involve schools as much as possible and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist and/or the deacon will hold non-Eucharistic forms of worship (Services of the Word, Adoration, Rosary etc) and Bible study groups and evangelisation videos and talks. It has been noted that this will offer an opportunity to worship and pray with ecumenical partners. There is a very strong will to become a confident positive Catholic presence in their respective communities and a recognition that this is a form of evangelisation that they are very comfortable with.

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