



Working Together To Evangelise Our Diocese

Clergy & Stewards Meeting, 30 September 2017

Question Time

At the meeting the Clergy and the Stewards received a presentation on the Draft Working Plan from the Director of Development (Steve Webb). The slides for that presentation and the Draft Working Plan itself have been put on the website for those who are interested. Following the presentation two Question and Answer sessions took place. The first was Structured and the second was unstructured.

Fr Chris Brooks introduced the panel: Bishop Alan Williams, Ann-Marie Conway (Member of Diocesan Strategic Planning Group) and Steve Webb.

Part One: Structured Questions

Questions had been submitted before the meeting. These were chosen to reflect the range of issues that parishes wanted to discuss and were representative of several similar questions asked by other people/parishes. Some of the points had been addressed in Steve Webb's presentation on the Draft Working Plan earlier in the morning.

Q1. As recognised in the "Renewal" section of the working draft, priests and laity will be working differently in a new relationship. This is a huge change for many of us and needs to be addressed very quickly to help our priests adapt and our laity step into the necessary leadership roles. At parish level we need support, guidance and formation. Are there any plans to offer this? Stephanie Davies, Upminster

Ann-Marie – This will be part of the strand on priests and people and it is critical to our work going forward. As laity and clergy we have more to learn about working with each other. It is a large learning curve and there is a role for the Diocese in facilitating it and providing resources, but as individuals there is much we can do now: listening to each other respectfully and actively; giving each other time and attention; valuing all contributions; volunteering and stepping up; and inviting the clergy to ask us to do things.

Steve – There is a need for resources. Some parts of the world especially the USA have done much already. For example, Canon Law allows, in extremis, the people to run a parish, and work has been done on how a parish relates to a priest who provides oversight. It is up to us to discern how to run our community but it has to be in the context of Canon Law and we will provide training materials on that. Priests are of course people, even though they have a unique role set out in Canon Law.

Q2. Has the engagement of priests from overseas been fully considered on either a short-term or more permanent basis? We are aware of a number of Indian priests and religious who would be open to this. David O'Ryan, Eastwood



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Bishop – The Diocese is blessed by the presence of priests, religious and laity from overseas. East London in particular is a very diverse place. The Diocese is as diverse as any diocese; it is open to accepting different presences, and that is to be encouraged. There are, however, practical difficulties about bringing priests in: we ran out of visas last year and are likely to do the same again this year. Politically, things might become more difficult in this respect; we might need to get more vocal about it. On the other hand, and as a principle, we ought to establish a local church, and so there is always be a balance to be struck in accepting offers from overseas.

Q3. Is it intended that each parish shall have an opportunity to suggest what role they play and where they fit within their future location? Fr Jeff Woolnough, Eastwood

Steve – Yes, as explained this morning, this document is part of a discernment process. We have asked genuine questions and we need to know what locations think. We also need to hear the questions that people have? We want a parity of voices, and from the start we have been committed to involving everyone.

Bishop – The process is one of discernment – listening, acting and praying together. You must feed in your thoughts before decisions are made.

Steve – But we need to remember that the Church is an episcopacy rather than a democracy. Ultimately, it is for the Bishop to take wise decisions on or behalf, as our Shepherd. There will be tensions between discernment and management.

Q4. One message that keeps being asked is why deacons and married men cannot become priests. Tony Rowley, Harlow

Bishop – They can be. Men ordained in another communion can become Catholic priests. We live in a Church with many views. My own quick response is that celibacy is at the heart of the priesthood. It is not just a matter of discipline; we need to have an “emptiness for God”, which is enriched by being celibate. And we need to be careful in assuming that the numbers of priests will be sustained by a run to marriage when marriage today is under question.

Some ask if the Ordinariate is a stop gap. I do not see them as such. They are a great gift to the Diocese. I tend to regard them as another religious order, one that is enriched by its own background and presence.

Q5. Faced with the potential increased parish boundaries how will the relationship of priest and Parishioners be maintained and, in particular, with the welcome and necessary greater involvement of the laity in parishes how will that change prevent the priest being seen as a “dispenser of the Sacraments”? Margaret Bailey, Hutton



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Bishop – We have been spoiled by having lots of priests in the UK. This is changing e.g. in Liverpool a priest might have 2 or 3 parishes; as a consequence, he sees less of his parishioners and they see less of him. When I worked abroad 40 parishes were linked to my parish centre. Here we have a wonderful relationship between priests and laity and it is really a question about how we handle things going forward together. There is a tension and no easy answer, but at our peril do we make the priest too remote.

Steve – This is a serious problem in other dioceses. Some have taken what seems to be a rather simplistic approach of bolting several parishes together, but this has led to priests not feeling welcomed, being conscious that they cannot be everywhere and to a doubling or tripling of meetings. Under Canon Law priests should feel valued and loved in their community; they have more than just a functional role, leading the Sacraments that only they can lead.

We are very conscious of the issue, hence the strand on lay leaders: how do we find them? How do we encourage them to stand up? There are models we can borrow from without re-inventing the wheel, but it is a specific issue for us and it is high on our list of priorities.

Q6. Re: framework 3rd Part, should some analysis be done on demographic and Mass attendance trends when it comes to prioritising the 21 locations? (Some traditionally high Mass attendance parishes have seen reductions in recent years and others have seen significant increases.) Fr Andrew Headon, Ilford

Ann-Marie – The questionnaire last year gave us a huge amount of data. We have 30 years of Mass attendance. We will take that into account, but combine it with macro and micro developments e.g. areas of expansion and immigration. It is not just a question of the position today.

Steve – We need to look at demographics and Mass attendance, but these are not static and, as the investment adverts say, past performance is not necessarily a guide to the future. There is development all over the Diocese; at every meeting I have attended, people have pointed to local developments e.g. in Chelmsford, Southend, Harlow and the Thames Gateway. We took schools and hospitals as a starting point and are waiting for your feedback on the next 21 locations – you might decide in particular locations that the church with the largest Mass attendance is not the best place for the future. The 2016 figures, when published, will paint a different picture to those for 2015, in part because of the way in which they have been constructed, so we will need to look at trends and ask why one location is different from another. We will produce a document that will provide a more detailed explanation of the numbers.

7. One of the suggestions coming through our parish consultation meetings is that we make full use of technology. It is suggested that when or if we have no priest but instead have a Saturday or Sunday Liturgy of the Word and Communion Service, we have a screen either streaming or showing a recording of the homily (or more) given by the parish priest from another church. Has this been done in the Diocese already or has the Diocese done any work on preparing for this possibility?



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John Dobner, Harwich

Bishop – There are local initiatives. In Southwark, Masses are streamed. In Youth Masses, some Twittering might take place. It's a good question. We need to move with technology, but I would add a note of caution. I would not want to find that one day there is just one Mass at the Cathedral and everyone in the Diocese is taking part in it through a variety of electronic gadgets. People must be able to “participate” in the Mass not just watch it.

Ann-Marie – There is a role for social media and technology, but it is more about informing each other e.g. telling where the Masses are rather than the picture painted by the question.

Q8. The Draft Plan often mentions the areas of “training” and “evangelisation”, but doesn't offer specific details. There is no mention of a strategy or budget. After two years of hard work, does the Diocese know our training priorities and how the evangelisation and mission efforts are going to be financed? It seems, as it stands now, that a lot is expected from the laity but very little has been put on the table to help them. Angie Hart, Kelvedon

Steve – We are asking a lot of the laity and rightly so. We will need to fund training at various levels. Electronic media and websites will become important. We are a large Diocese in terms of area and travelling from one part to another is difficult, which is where electronic media could come in. How we go about setting up budgets and training will, in part, depend on the resources we are able to liberate. We have some ideas, but want to hear from you first. We also need to take account of the different ways in which people learn, and get the balance right.

But we must watch that we do not make things too complicated. We can all do little things – the mustard seeds – quite naturally: smiling when we leave church; the welcome we give to others; and how we forgive them and let them forgive us.

Q9. What model of church is guiding our discussions? Is it constituted by a number of predominately lay-led local self-generating communities? Or a number of units, each dependent on a priest or priests? Fr Quentin, Woodford Green

Bishop – I would not choose one in preference to the other. As individuals, we each have a model of the Church and things can fall down when we meet people who have a different model. As Catholics, we should be able to embrace a range. For example, we all have an acute sense of sin, but we also recognise the mercy and forgiveness of God. We should be able to put a good construction on what others are telling us. So I would not proclaim a lay-led approach, though there is much to value in it, because we have a sense of shared theology and hierarchy. Nor would I see the number of units approach - as some dioceses have adopted - as being necessarily sensible. Communities are where we find them.



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Q10. In relation to restructuring and the Third Framework proposal: is it possible to list the 21 high Mass attendance locations (eg using the current attendance data), preferably in some kind of priority/ranking order? I believe it will be helpful for parishes to see where these locations are likely to be. Further, is it possible to identify which of these locations are likely to be part of the 13 locations mentioned for the long term? Mark Poulter, Loughton

Steve – This follows on from Q6. We did not identify the locations in the Draft Working Plan because we saw the question as one of principle – is this the right approach? We did not want some parishes thinking that the principle was right because they came out in the right place. The Diocesan Directory has the 2015 figures and the next document will include reference to a more sophisticated description of the numbers.

Q11. Does the selection of locations where schools are found mean that our secondary schools will become responsible for preparing our young people for the sacrament of confirmation? Stephanie Davies, Upminster

Bishop – My quick response is that we will not want to encourage the celebration of Confirmation in schools because it will encourage the disconnection between parishes and their youth. And I am not sure that schools would welcome it. On a more general point, sacraments are generally found in parishes and what goes on in parishes is under our control to a degree. In the future we might have a problem with the flexibility of our schools, especially in the society in which we live. At the moment we could only open a new school if we were to accept that only 50% of the pupils will be Catholic (and the Bishops will not support that). The Conservative manifesto promised to change this, but the Government has not done so yet.

Q12. I understand from Canon Law that only priests can say Mass and administer the Sacraments. Lay people need to know which “hidden” things priests do can be delegated. Surely in most, if not all, parishes, lay people are already doing a fair amount of catechesis, visiting the sick and administrative tasks. It would be good to know how good practice can be shared and what else is expected? Peter Robson, Chingford

Steve – One of the reasons why I issued the Rough Guide to Canon Law recently was to show that the laity are already empowered to do things, while recognising that some things are reserved to the parish priest. The way forward on this will also depend on some of the other strands; we need to tease out where we can do things differently. We will need to be more collaborative. Some of it will, of course, depend on personalities, which is where respectful and active listening comes in. We are conscious that while working together over the next few years we will need to do as much as we can to help each other.

Q13. Why does it feel like any parishes situated in areas where there is no hospital or secondary school have been abandoned? Shiela Wright, Frinton



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Steve – Every day I face a map of East London and Essex. We are acutely aware of the geography of the Diocese. The 14 is the starting point and then we go on to the second and third parts of the exercise. Our vision is the provision of sacraments and pastoral care across the Diocese, not its restriction to a few places. Please take back to your parish the strong promise that you have not been abandoned.

Q14. When the number of “centres” around hospitals and schools are established, what are the plans for presbyteries, churches etc that will no longer be required as a parish or mass centre? When will the relevant parishes be notified/consulted re the future of their current premises?

Jacque Grieve, Ilford

Steve – The consultation process has started and we have asked for feedback. Our First Proposal document will provide a more defined landscape but it will still not be the final answer. Consultation will continue. For some parishes this will be an issue. Canon Law places “ownership” with the parish so there will have to be consultation, but we cannot set a date for it now.

Q15. There is no mention of universities or university chaplaincies in the document. Are we intending to include young people at university on our thinking for the future? Fr Mark Swires

Bishop – Brentwood is a curious diocese in relation to universities; we are the 4th largest but have fewer university centres than smaller dioceses. University chaplaincies are a focus for encouraging vocations to the consecrated life. Thank you for putting the issue on the agenda. Perhaps universities should have their own steward.

Steve – The Church has a corporate responsibility for looking after the stranger in our midst. We should look after the student from elsewhere in the same way that we would want other dioceses to look after our sons and daughters who are studying there. The point is well made; it needs to be a serious part of our conversation.

As a conclusion, the Bishop said that it was in the nature of a gathering such as this that not everybody had an opportunity to speak, but it was important that everyone’s voice was heard. Network! Talk to each other, to the Director of Development, to the DSPG and to your priest. Raise ideas so that they can be taken into account.

Part Two: Unstructured Questions

These questions arose from the discussion at tables or over lunch.

Introducing the session, the Bishop said as a matter of theology Catholics should view everything in life in relation to God. The Catholic Church was about truth – “I am the way, the truth and the life”. If we have a secure footing, we should look at everything and we should not be afraid to be asked anything. As the letter to the Hebrews said: Be Bold!



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Q1. In that context, a suggestion had been made that a priest should join COURAGE to help with the ministry to those with a same sex attraction and to their parents.

Bishop - Although this is not a question to address today because the focus is on the Draft Working Plan, it is one that I and parish priests needed to consider and do something about. As we go along all sorts of questions about pastoral activity will emerge and should be raised.

Q2 There is a parallel initiative across the Diocese involving Catholic schools - to form multiple academy trusts on a deanery basis. Should we not have a closer relationship with this parallel universe over the next 3 years?

Bishop – The Education Service in the Diocese has been re-founded, with a new Director and 4 new advisers. The schools in the Diocese are a terrific resource. The Education Service would need to be grafted in to this consultation.

Steve - The Draft Working Plan makes specific reference to schools. The Episcopal Vicar for Education, who had been present this morning, knows all about this initiative. The two need to be better integrated. The link between school, family and a parish is vital, and we under-estimate it at our peril.

Q3. Will you publish collated feedback on this part of the consultation before the next document is printed?

Steve – We will pull the themes, the responses to them and the comments together in a summary.

Q4. Steve spoke about being nice to the people around you. Please expand. We need to be equipped to go out and bring people in.

Bishop – After a recent talk I gave on evangelisation, someone asked me why it was so complicated. It is not. Some think it is about going outside and preaching. Others think it is about a mission to lapsed Catholics. The US Bishops talk about bringing the light of Christ wherever we can. As such, it is a challenge for all of us and we should do it well.

Steve – It is both/and rather than either/or. We can make it too complicated. All of us can focus on the basics, but not everyone does. As the Pope said, some Catholics are all Lent and no Easter Sunday. We need to put resources into training. People have different talents. For some, it is about going out to difficult places and bringing in people. For others, it is about being faithful and good witnesses.

Ann-Marie – As lay people, we should watch that we do not get caught up in the thought that we do not fit into the evangelisation train. It is about leading the life that Jesus taught us so that people see our faith at work in us. It is about those tiny moments.



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Q5. Today has been about structure. We have not mentioned the life and death of Jesus. Is the mission serving the structure or the structure the mission? Renewal and restructuring is covering the cracks of a bigger issue. By nature we are visionary animals; we want to be bigger and better to bring people to the intimacy of Jesus Christ. Can we revisit the lack of vision?

Bishop – There is lots packed in there. The life and death of Jesus must be at the heart of what we do. But different people will place a different emphasis on the need for structure. The balance is part of the ongoing conversation.

Q6. At a deanery level we are passionate about the Church not the process. There are different models of Church. We need to understand where the Pope comes from, the religiosity of people. We should look at models in Latin America, Africa and Asia where the Church has become a movement of people. If we start from below, the structure will come later. The Plan should have blueprints of models to empower the laity.

Steve – I am not sure that I understood all of the points and would welcome a further conversation about them. However, I disagree with the basic premise: we need to start with where and who we are now. Our perception was that work had to be done to take the Diocese forward. There are different models of Church, but the Draft Working Plan is not a functional analysis, rather it is a pastoral approach. We are trying to put something in place that works because we have developed it together. We are where we are because of the journey we have gone through. We cannot delay decisions about the structure into the future because we face a serious position.

Q7. We are asked to think about succession planning. Is the Youth involved in thinking about the future?

Fr Dominic Howarth (from the floor) – Absolutely. We need to include the wisdom of all ages as we work through the journey together. We have a particular focus on preparing for the 2018 Synod on Youth and Faith, and our deliberations will be fed into the Stewards of the Gospel process.

Q8. How will people who live in remote areas and cannot get to Mass be considered and cared for in the future?

Steve – Please remember that we will not get a picture of the Diocese's geography until we get to the end of the process. But we will need to look at different ways of priestly administration. For example, itinerant priests. I had assumed that the idea would be unacceptable but some people see it as an attractive option. We have asked for ideas and thoughts, and we will factor them in. People in remote areas have not been forgotten and they will not be taken for granted.

Q9. I work in the NHS. Why is there a focus on hospitals when the NHS is laying great stress on the individual taking care of their own health, and on health being provided in the community or in hospices?



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Bishop – We do have a Healthcare Chaplaincy but I recognise that we need to talk to people like you about current and future developments or we might find that we are not giving the right response.

Q10. What is your understanding of a sacramental Church? Will you look at it again?

Bishop – Talk to us. Write down your vision and share it. If you do not, you will not be heard.

Q11. Evangelisation is not a goal in itself but the means to a goal, the formation of disciples. The vision should reflect joy.

Ann-Marie – I am struck that there is probably more the DSPG could do to define the goal. As with all large change, we could do more to define the vision and to deliver the practical resources you need. I have been very struck by the power and enthusiasm of everyone here today but I am also conscious that many people are not (yet) interested.

Bishop – Good discernment is always in touch with reality. The more information we can provide, the better.

Q12. The future of the Church is in the hands of the young. Where have the candidates for Confirmation gone? Should we be asking secondary school students for their views?

Steve – This will be part of the continuing work with the Director and Episcopal Vicar Education. The recent statistics are scary: 75% of 17-24 year olds say that they have no religious affiliation. This is a worry for all of us and we need to do something about it.

Q13. Many in my parish go to non-Catholic schools. The family is a key agent in delivering the gospel, but the world is at odds with our view of the family. Is there scope for building the family into the strands of work?

Steve – I accept that. It is part of the other strands but not explicitly so. We should make it more central.

Q14. In a school yesterday I had a discussion about what unconditional love means. I wondered if the students can have that discussion with their parents. There is a difference between parents' understanding of the Gospel and the way it is taught in schools. This is a key gap in evangelisation. Homes have lost the knowledge of what to do at an early stage to pass on the message.

Bishop – I agree.

Q15. Can we rethink the objectives? Saying we want to maximise sacramental provision means we miss out on a lot. To me the sacraments are a visible sign of reality. Can we have something about Christ-centered communications and developing a relationship with God?



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Bishop – Clearly, the messages are there to be rewritten. We might need more theological language in some places. Please communicate with us. I would make the point, though, that if we try to write the documents as a group we will end up with a camel with 75 humps.

Q16. As a seminarian, I am proud to be part of a diocese that is really open about these issues. We are handing ourselves over to God and He is in control. We could communicate this joyful message and time on social media.

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