



Working Together To Evangelise Our Diocese

FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT WORKING PLAN

This document contains a representative sample of the feedback that was received in relation to the Draft Working Plan. Most of it came in before the meeting of Stewards and Clergy on 30th September but some followed afterwards.

Partly in order to keep it to a manageable length and partly to remove references to specific people or places some editing has been done but we have tried to be open and transparent. A large number of responses were just favourable to the overall plan and the length of any feedback below does not indicate that it has any more weight or support than a shorter or longer piece of feedback. The order of feedback is rather random but earlier feedback tends to be at the beginning.

Well done on the just produced document.... I am pleased that, in our planning, our secondary schools are considered highly significant.

Even the title gives the right tone: OUR diocese. Thank you.
There's a lot to think and pray about!
God bless and bless your great work.

- What is being done to recruit priests from another countries that might have a surplus? Have we considered inviting other/new religious communities, both from home and abroad, to live and serve in our diocese? Are we encouraging and searching to ordain more deacons?
- Why has there not been more collaboration with our African twin parishes? Perhaps secondment of priests for periods of time?
- There is no reference in the plan to the vastly ambitious plans for further development of housing in Essex – 26,000 houses over the next 20 years in Colchester, Braintree and Tendring – we must anticipate the growth in additional hospitals and schools.
- There is already experience of what we are proposing in other dioceses, are we benefiting from their experiences?
- The CoE has grappled with the same issues, as well as the fact that the London Boroughs generate the greatest demand: should we create a new diocese for the London Boroughs? What is the CoE proposing to do?



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- The response on the recognised need to be more attractive to the young in the report was seriously lightweight. See what is happening in the CoE. How can we be different?
- There is no mention in the report of the church as a 'community' and the importance of the priest as leader of that community....It takes time to build a community and without a priest it will fall apart. People will scatter like sheep without a shepherd in all directions or just give up!
- Transport: once rural parishes begin to lose their Mass centres, transportation to Sunday Mass for elderly parishioners or those without a car will become an issue. It will be difficult for the older generation to go to Mass without appropriate transport but also it will imply longer and more difficult journeys, especially as Sunday travel is not frequent. Alternatives would have to be found, like hiring a coach, which still doesn't solve the length of the journeys. However, presuming the monthly collection will go down as well, how are the rural parishes going to sustain themselves?
- While focusing on the administration of the Sacraments is important, we are missing the point that some Sacraments – wedding, baptisms, First Holy Communion and Confirmation - are actually community affairs and opportunities for evangelisation to the wider family. What would happen to the First Holy Communion and Confirmation preparation?

Very important is the fact that although the document mentions a great deal the areas of 'training' and 'evangelisation', it is very vague about detail. It doesn't seem to be a diocesan strategy for either of them nor mention of a budget. Furthermore, what are our training priorities and how the evangelisation and mission efforts are going to be financed?

How much of the charity work, training and evangelising is going to be the responsibility of the parish and how is the diocese going to support the work? It seems that a lot is being expected from the parishes and very little training or resources is being offered to them.

Does the diocese still intend to retain the churches and allow the parish communities to service them once there is no longer a resident priest? Or will they be sold off and the community expected then to become part of a larger community in the nearest town instead?



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Integration to a new parish community will be difficult especially as many churches are difficult to get to and many people do not drive.
Are all other dioceses in the UK in the same position as Brentwood? Have we asked them for help or loan of priests?
Will lay people be given more authority to do more?
Could churches be kept with a rota of priests to say Mass every two weeks and try to retain the sense of community?

The overwhelming sense from ...was one of positivity, openness to change and an appetite to make things happen. The Holy Spirit is indeed at work!

A few bullet points responding to the questions raised in the Summary on Page 23 of the Plan.

- A Yes - we agree that Renewal and Restructuring are inseparable elements of, and integral to, the pursuit of the Vision.
- B Yes - The 12-strand strategy is closely reflective of the views elicited from our Parish consultation process and wholly endorsed by our Parish.
- There was nevertheless a great deal of animated debate reiterating and emphasising views about specific aspects of Renewal which were expressed in the original consultation, in particular:
 - Strand 5 – Priests and People – acknowledgement of need for an appetite to provide greater laity support, facilitated by quality training and formation.
 - Strands 7 and 8 – Schools and Our Young People – Importance of links to schools; opportunities for catechises (including Confirmation) to be undertaken collectively at school-level (rather than individual parishes); need for dedicated (professional) youth leadership for the new ‘locations’ (or ideally now).



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- Strand 10 and 12 - Vocations and Integration – need for families to follow the example/tradition set by the Syro Malabar community in encouraging their children towards vocations through prayerful family life. The need to provide effective transition post-First Holy Communion by inviting further involvement in the Liturgy e.g. Alter Servers, music, reading etc...
- C Yes – from our perspective allocating resources to locations which have secondary schools and hospital makes complete sense in that it responds directly to the need for sacramental provision, encourages closer links with our secondary schools and creates opportunities for continued and better engagement with our young people.
- No strong views as to which structure would work best emerged from the debate i.e. hubs or larger merged parishes.
- Both such structures are the normal *modus operandi* in many locations. A number of people related their experiences of parishes structured in this way in Ireland and indeed rural areas of England. They all seem to work and have been sustained over many years.
- We appreciate that determining the geography of a 'location' is to an extent dependent on the preferred structure which is adopted but it is difficult to evaluate how our 'location' could operate without some understanding of the make-up of our eventual 'location'. A chicken-and-egg conundrum!
- However, we feel it would be helpful if we were able to understand from 'live' examples of how each of the structures works in practice and what works well and the related challenges they present.
- An alternative idea of a 'super hub' church, being a new build minster-type church serving a single 'location', was aired. We believe that, although ambitious, there are merits in considering this option including, a clear visual presence in the local community, creating a focus for a location-wide Catholic community without the barriers of a multi-parish structure, more effective deployment of both Clergy and Laity resources and financial economies of scale. It was also suggested that this aligns with Second Council on ecumenism in so far as becoming a focal point for inter-faith events and also a greatly needed confidence boost for Catholic clergy and laity. A great



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statement of our united (undiluted) presence as a Christian church in the community.

1. How to select new Catechists and educate them, perhaps on the parish level?
2. Why the Diocese is slow to implement Bible Study sessions in the parishes?
3. Catholic schools need more presence of Clergies and is it possible to set up a competition among our schools about Catholic and Christian values?

Feedback on 'Working Together to Evangelise Our Diocese

- A) No. The renewal and restructuring of our parishes do not take into account the tried and tested model used first by Jesus Christ himself, and the Apostles and then the Early Fathers, through (1) teaching, (2) preaching, (3) healing, and (3) deliverance. This vision is based more on human response, rather than divine response, to human problems.
- B) No. There is a strong case for: (1) sacramental provision and 2) evangelisation. Regarding sacramental provision, more 'qualified' parishioners need to be trained and given the resources, if necessary, to support priests in various capacities e.g. going to homes and hospitals and praying for sick parishioners. Evangelisation will mean parishioners trained to be proficient with the Word of God: to evangelise in our churches and outside. The gospel has to be proclaimed as the Kingdom of God on earth as Jesus Christ proclaimed, with healing, sign and wonders following the proclamation as promised in the scriptures. (Mark 16: 17-20)
- C) No. Evangelisation is the future base for Renewal and Restructuring for our parishes. Through evangelisation we will be more likely to bring more people to Christ, more vocations and more lay people working in new ways to build the Kingdom of God in East London and Essex.

Question A

Our parishioners appreciate that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue our vision.

Question B

We agree that the 12- point plan covers the right strand of work.



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Some comments recorded are:

Strand 3 Money - We are not an affluent parish and it is felt there are too many second collections in addition to our own commitment to other charities.

Strand 11 Liturgy There is a need for training of and ongoing formation for Extraordinary ministers in our parish.

Strand 12 Integration - some clarity was requested on 'the various traditions '

Are ecumenism and interfaith work covered in the renewal plan?

Question C

We are satisfied that the framework provides a good model for restructuring our Diocese. However, some would like further clarity on the framework. One question is in respect of our .. churches, there are a number of Religious Order Priests. How will they be integrated in the proposed changes given that they can only be moved by their leaders?

In the responses to our parish questionnaire parishioners suggested that a combined programme for the young people of our .. churches would best serve our young people. When there was a Youth Chaplain and youth services .. young people got involved. When these services were removed to the diocese youth involvement declined. There are no youth masses for our young people and the Cathedral church is not easily accessible.

It would also be easier to access training and formation in the Deanery than travelling into Essex.

We acknowledged that Bishop Alan will have to make many difficult decisions. We will continue to pray for Bishop Alan and the success of the Stewards of the Gospel initiative.

I see this document as a provocative invitation enabling us to question and explore the way ahead for the Diocese. I would be concerned if it is a fait accompli as there are too many confusing variables in the document.

A plan for the future likely needs a loose structure that is adaptable and manageable. Here we have a rigid structure that will be difficult to work with and evangelise from.



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Generally speaking dramatic changes very rarely work and often create and establish strong antagonism.

The restructuring seems to be based on clergy number predictions that may or may not turn out to be valid. Pope Francis is encouraging us to be creative with our ideas – particularly regarding married priests. We already have a basis to work from with married Anglican priests in our diocese. This could be an important way forward.

We could look at a more robust role for Deacons. We could look at a stronger role for lay women in the Church: we need to train catechists and pastoral assistants urgently at diocesan level - it was a mistake to consider such things should be devolved to parishes. We could look at the general integration of Ordinariates and other groups in the church.

Hospitals are evolving and changing. They are becoming more speciality based and this means patients may be drawn from a much wider geographical area. More importantly hospitals now tend to have a short stay policy for patients. These patients then return into the community where they need care and ongoing spiritual support from the Parish. The Sacrament of the Sick often happens in their local church or at the individual's home rather than the hospitals.

Very little has been mentioned in the plan about our Parishes becoming multinational with such a variety of different cultures and the spiritual growth and devotion this brings to the church. The vision presented here is very limited. We are the Catholic Church with a world wise outlook not with a limited national agenda. Open appreciation of the immense contribution of people from other countries to our diocese will encourage vocations from these groups.

The importance of getting young people on board should be a key objective as young people are the seed corn for the future and it is important to actively involve them in the Mass and Parish activities. Secondary schools no longer seem to be the focus for spiritual learning but the focus mainly for academic learning. Confirmation has been 'Parish based' for many years and no longer happens in secondary schools.

There has been very limited mention of training and education generally. Should our spiritual journey finish when we leave school/university? Should there be an ongoing training programme throughout the life of a Catholic? Is the spiritual education that is now missing from secondary schools needing to be appropriately replaced in the Parish. Is this fundamental to the changes that have to happen?



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RENEWAL

As far as the 12 Strand Plan is concerned there was general agreement that it was a good way to pursue our vision. There were however several remarks about 'dejavu' and 'we've been here before' i.e. Vision 2000 and Put out into the Deep. Requests were made for more information about the Vicariates that already have a flow of work. What are they doing? Where is it being done?

There was an understanding that we need to change and work differently but, not surprisingly, an element of "not us, not here."

Mention was made of needing clear goals for 2019.

In the future, could the possibility of on-line feedback be considered?

The desire to integrate various (liturgical) traditions was supported, but, in view of the mobility of modern communities was seen as very difficult to implement.

RE-STRUCTURING

This was considered a much more obscure matter and difficult to visualise the framework as it stands. There was a consensus about the need for restructuring but little agreement about implementation! Very diverse attitudes were expressed towards priorities, both pastoral and financial (no change there then).

The decision to make young people a priority both in renewal and restructuring was applauded and the choice of 'protected' areas with secondary schools and hospitals was accepted but with some qualification. In general it was felt that in those areas where the provision of Mass **may** diminish, it will be a kind of situation of diminishing returns, in that eventually fewer people will bother to come at times when Mass is available.

RENEWAL

The process of renewal is always dependent upon the man-power to deliver (the 12 strands) at a local level. It is a dilemma that in those areas where population is concentrated, many people are there to be served but fewer people are prepared/able to commit to being actively involved. This is particularly the case with families (especially single parent families) where demands of work leave little spare time. At present the majority of those who have time are inevitably in



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the senior/retired age group. I suggest that the present youth age group should be involved in the plans we are making,

RE-STRUCTURING

several people suggested that planning around fixed structures (hospitals and schools) may not provide enough useful flexibility. In any particular area, by 2035, they may not exist anymore as the NHS and Education Depts also re-structure their provision.

For many people 'parish' and where they go to Mass are separate/distinct. We may need to include that thinking in future plans.

In answer to the questions posed in the document summary, parishioners generally welcome the twin objectives of Renewal and Restructuring and in particular the emphasis on the church being sacramental. The consultative aspect of the Stewards of the Gospel initiative and the fact that responses are taken into account is widely appreciated and it is felt that Bishop Alan is approaching the issue sensibly but also sensitively.

There was deep-felt concern that if parish communities, known and led by their parish priest who plays an important and ongoing role in educating parishioners in their faith, were dismantled and split up, they could be irretrievably lost. It will indeed be difficult to get people to accept the outcomes of the process if they lose their church and feel that their parish community is threatened. In terms of the suggested time frame, people felt that the focus should be on the medium term as events might overtake and provisions made up to 2035 based on current estimates might be wrong.

RENEWAL

There was some concern that the 12 stated points were quite business-like and that if the numbering was in order of priority, they were giving a great deal of attention to certain material aspects of the diocese. Points that were not included or explicitly stated and deemed important were as follows:

Outreach/evangelization: having outreach groups within all parishes, fully integrated into the working of parishes. It was felt that the diocese might research the reasons why only 1 in 5 baptized Catholics attends church in order to better inform evangelization initiatives by parishes and their outreach groups. The potential role of religious in evangelization efforts within parishes was brought up, as well as promoting a culture of devotion to Our Lady (praying the rosary on Skype). Welcoming people into the parish and inviting them to social events was mentioned, as well as inviting school choirs to sing at parish masses and priests visiting local non-Catholic schools to teach about the faith.



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Communication, media & presence in the public square: ideas put forward included:

- ✚ Make use of local radio (and TV where possible) to reach out to the wider diocesan public; regular broadcasts (“God slot”) by clergy and laity on various aspects of our religious and daily lives
- ✚ Wearing a cross around the neck
- ✚ Setting up a 24/7 Catholic helpline
- ✚ The use of technology/social media
- ✚ Visible Catholic posters/signs outside churches (e.g. a banner advertising RCIA)
- ✚ A mobile church travelling around the diocese
- ✚ Visible, faith events

It would also be useful to have something like a FAQs document, helping practising Catholics to provide answers when they come under attack (e.g. accusations of hypocrisy on the part of the Catholic Church).

The elderly: transport was an important issue in the parish feedback. There was a strong sense that even a small but devout group of elderly, practising Catholics should not be abandoned without access to mass and the sacraments.

In terms of some points mentioned in the document, further comments were made:

7/8 Schools & Working with and for young people

Young parishioners in particular stressed the importance of increasing the emphasis on prayer and bible study to foster closeness to our Lord and Christianity, suggesting prayer & bible study in the context of clubs at school, camps, weekends, sports events, using also drama and gospel choirs. They would also appreciate access to appropriate materials to increase their knowledge of the faith (DVDs, books – possibly commissioning DVDs for parents and families), on-line formation & mass. Being part of a big group of altar servers was much appreciated.

One person expressed the opinion that there could be greater school involvement in the preparation of children for First Holy Communion and Confirmation; the importance of maintaining a Catholic ethos in Catholic schools was stressed. It was also felt that primary schools should be included in diocesan planning.

10 Vocations

Promoting a culture of vocations in parish, schools and family through active, on-going encouragement to vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, the religious life and marriage was seen as very important.

RESTRUCTURING

In terms of Restructuring, the omission of the University of Essex Chaplaincy was widely commented on and the importance of the Catholic Chaplain was stressed. It is felt that a dedicated priest is needed so that students are able to develop a trusting relationship. The University of Essex Chaplaincy is deemed to be a vital place for young



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people, vocations and evangelization, helping to orient first year students by giving them a place providing support but also where they might bring their friends. Overall, the Chaplaincy is deemed to be a place that fosters vocations and prevents young, vulnerable students who have just left home from drifting away from their faith.

Parishioners fear that any potential church closures could cause Catholic communities to be lost, with people migrating to another Christian denomination with a local church. Before reducing the number of parishes, priests from other countries could be brought into the diocese and members of religious orders could be involved.

We understand the need to restructure the Diocese, and are keen to support this process. We felt that the restructure section of the document was very clear, outlining the expected restrictions and how we hope to respond to them. The renewal section was far more vague and open to interpretation. This is disappointing as we are looking forward to the renewal work as this is our opportunity for growth. We would welcome more detail and direction throughout the whole of the renewal part of the proposals

Other points that the members of the parish were keen to make were that we would like to make an effort to include the older members of our parish community and to include strategies to reach out to people who are becoming isolated because of their advancing age and declining health. It was also noted that including forceful phrases like WILL in uppercase seemed to be out of keeping with the general style of the document which, as it stated itself, sought to be 'loving and caring'.

A) Yes we agree that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way forward.

However, we feel that "Our Objectives" need working on. We seem to have put the 7 liturgical sacraments at the centre of the objectives at a time when we are planning for fewer priests, the sole dispensers of most of those sacraments. We feel there are some very important things missing.



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We, the People of God (priests and lay) are the Church, and we live in Faith Communities. We are the "Sacrament of the Church", the presence (we pray) of Christ on earth. Just our presence, in any given space, is silently Evangelising.

" In the beginning was the word". Should we not proclaimed the Good News in our words and in our lives?

The Pope talks about "Spirit-filled Evangelisers". Should we not give more prominence to the Holy Spirit?

Our Diocese is made up of parishes. This is what Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* says about the Parish: "the presence of the Church in a given territory; an environment for hearing Gods' word; for growth in the Christian life; for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration". Sacraments are an important part of our tradition but we feel they are and should continue to be a visible sign of the reality of Christ's presence in the Parish, in the Church.

Should our objectives not include more about Communities? Is our objective not to have/consolidate/develop/encourage "CHRIST CENTRED FAITH COMMUNITIES" which are open to the HOLY SPIRIT, where the WORD is proclaimed, SACRAMENTS celebrated and CHARITY practiced? Communities that are prayerful, joyful, live by Gospel values, and reach out to others. In that way they are able to evangelise within and outside their communities. One parishioner said, "a loving kind, caring community first and foremost", another, "the best evangelising effect is to have joyful catholics". That brings us back to the opening paragraph of *Evangelii Gaudium* : "THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL FILLS THE HEARTS OF ALL WHO ENCOUNTER JESUS" and on the same page the Pope says, "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord". The sad reality is that some people are excluded from some sacraments and therefore we need to ensure that we include all ways of developing a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.

It would be good if the document was interspersed with more joyful and short inspirational prayer sections followed by practical plans.

B)Yes we agree that the 12-point plan covers the right strands of work but we have the following comments:

2) Leaders: Some people did not like the reference to "new" leaders and wanted to stress the idea of consolidation and encouragement of what we already have; an experienced and dedicated laity willing to undertake work in the parish. Lay leaders should "emerge" from the community but be appointed by the Diocese to ensure continuity.



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4) Property: We should consider sharing properties with schools and also other churches.

5) Priests and People: We feel that the relationship between the Priest and people needs to be stated and that the key role of the priest needs to be defined, stipulating what the priest is expected to do (and not do) and what the laity are expected to do (and not do).

As regards **Priests** we feel they need particular support. They, possibly more than lay people, face much change; change in some of the things they do and the way they do them, change in where they will live and who they will live with.

7) Schools: The needs of the 3 Universities in our Diocese are very important and these are surely very fruitful ground for evangelization (already acknowledged by Bishop Alan at 30 Sept meeting). We had highlighted the needs of children at non catholic schools but this has already been accepted, also that there is no wish for secondary schools to take over confirmation preparation.

8) Young people: Whilst specifically separate work with young people is very important, we in the parishes, need to have enough imagination and flexibility to allow and encourage them to participate fully in routine parish activities and, if they so desire to develop an aspect of parish life which particularly appeals to them e.g. promoting social justice.

9) Charity (can we keep things simple and call it that please): We fully agree that this is fundamental to our church and therefore to any parish/faith community. Love God and your neighbour as yourself- easier said than done. Maybe in this area we need empowerment, guidance and encouragement rather than training as such but we also need prayer.

10) Vocations: Our suggestions: "fast track" training for the priesthood for mature men. Facilitating part time or limited period ministry of some sort. Liked with this (and with the likelihood of underused property) communities of lay and ordained people serving a parish or a particular need. Married and women priests was also mentioned by a lot of people.

11) Liturgy: The point about continuity (2 above) is relevant here also, the Diocese should set ground rules so that lay involvement is encouraged in all places and does not change when the parish priest does.

12) Intergration: (This may represent an additional strand). People have mentioned working and sharing more closely with other denominations. Also, and this applies to very rural areas, where the catholic community is very sparse, how can we care for the needs of an ageing population who do not drive but want to be part of a Christian community. Can they share services with other denominations?



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...the Diocese had a mobile Church (a van fitted out with everything one needed to say Mass) which was driven to many parts of Essex, parked up and opened so the local Catholic community could attend Mass. Our thoughts were slightly different ..of a floating Church which could travel up and down the coastline pulling into various locations so the local communities could attend Mass, Confession and meet with the Priest... a floating Church might attract the younger community to see the Church functioning in a unique way rather than being building based.

A Google Group where we could all chat and talk to each other to see how we are getting on with this work. It would also save time in travelling to meet with each other although the benefits of meeting face to face are not to be ignored. We learn more from each other when we can see each other's faces because we know that communication is only 7% words.

A Closed Facebook page, again where we can chat and talk to each other on a more regular basis. Sharing good practice and not reinventing the wheel is a great time saver but it also needs talking about to ensure we are on the right lines.

A. Do you agree that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue our Vision? ANSWER: YES in principle but NO in the draft proposals set out.. The concerns over the approach in the Diocese's document were highlighted in the key findings of our survey...

1. 98% thought the Diocese should consider different restructuring options other than closing churches and removing priests (see question C).

2. 86% said they would be willing to donate more money each week to keep their church open.

3. 66% said they would be "less likely to attend Mass" if [their church]is closed. With the Diocese admitting in the document that 80% of Catholics in the area already do not regularly attend Mass, this figure should be of grave concern. It highlights a theme in our response that renewal cannot be achieved through cuts.



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4. 81% said renewal should be the priority while 12.5% thought renewal and restructuring are equal. The consensus was that the Diocese's document was prioritising restructuring (i.e. closing churches or removing priests from them).

Restructure over renewal?

As you can see from the survey findings, the overwhelming view (81%) is that renewal needs to be the primary goal and restructuring should serve this purpose, not the other way around. □ We strongly agree with the first lines of the Vision and Objectives laid out in the document: "Proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in Essex and East London" and "Maximise the opportunities for evangelisation" □ Unfortunately, the overall content does not seem to support this ethos. □ This document suggests that restructuring plans are far more advanced than renewal ones which are lacking in detail (see answer to question B). □ We do not find evidence of the "interconnectedness" that the Bishop talks about between renewal and restructuring in this document. This is of great concern to us, as parishioners have told us: "Renewal appears to be a cloak for closing churches." "This is a numbers game and not one about increasing the number of the faithful." Conclusion: We believe that the proposals need to be completely refocused from prioritising restructuring to making renewal the primary focus.

B. Are you satisfied that the 12-point plan for Renewal covers the right strands of work? ANSWER: NO Summary The document beautifully reflects on the JOY of Pope Francis: "He tells us that he dreams of a missionary impulse in our church so that we can go out into our community with joy to spread the Gospel message." ..However, while the Diocese's document is high on excellent basic sentiments (i.e. engaging more with young people, adult formation, doing charitable works etc.), it is lacking in details and clarity to deliver this vision. We feel strongly that renewal is the most important thing for the Church going forward, as we live in an increasingly secular society which knows the love of Jesus Christ and Mary less and less. This needs to be addressed in detail. Conclusion: The lack of detail gives the impression that this is a management document, rather than one that puts renewal and evangelisation at the heart of the process.

...

C. Are you satisfied that the Framework provides a good model for us to restructure our Diocese? ANSWER: NO

..It will come as no surprise that this was the most controversial section of the whole document and was the most disappointing for us, not only because it puts the future of our Parish in question, but also because we feel that the proposals bear no relation to



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the primary need for renewal and evangelisation. □ We feel it bears the hallmarks of a Calvinist Predestination approach for salvation, rather than a Catholic approach of good works. □ The criteria are based on what parishes physically are, in terms of location and size, not on what they are doing and how they are engaging with the outside community. □ The restructuring section appears to have been predetermined and not based on evidence of what is happening in parishes, there is barely a reference to the previous consultation led by the Stewards of the Gospel. ... Conclusion: The Diocese needs to rethink its approach and look at whether there is an actual need to reduce churches and priests, or at the least link its criteria to renewal not to number.

the specific points we were asked to comment on:

A) Yes.

B) Yes. I'd like to comment on #7 and #8.

#7: As a parent and for some time a governor of A Catholic Primary School I have long been deeply concerned about declining Catholicity in our schools. As our society becomes a cesspit of greed, materialism and intolerance and as we face a tidal wave of aggressive Atheism it's more important than ever that our schools effectively teach our children Christ's message of love.

I think back to my school days ..and recall the Catholic message at the heart of our education.

- All children at our schools were Catholics. The majority went to Mass on a Sunday and we knew how to say our prayers.
- The Headteacher and all Teachers in our Primary School were practising Catholics.
- We would see our Teachers at Mass and they would see us.
- In Secondary School the majority of our Teachers were practising Catholics.

I compare and contrast that with what I've observed over the years ... and I see a Catholicity that is fading fast.

I'm hoping Diocesan activity on Education goes way beyond the ideas (wish list?) described in document that was attached at #7.

#8: this vital part of the Diocesan plan is in safe hands for I cannot imagine anyone more suited to this role. I've seen first-hand the marvellous work done with the youth of our Diocese .. through BCYS and the engagement achieved with young Catholics was truly remarkable and sometimes quite moving.

C) Yes.

The restructuring strand reminds me very much of many discussions at Ford re the size and structure of the dealer body in the UK and elsewhere. There we settled on a "hub and spoke" solution that works well after some initial teething problems. I'm reassured by what I read in the document that key restructuring challenges are recognised and are being addressed.



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Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* was commended to us at the local meeting and I am currently reading it. It's a wonderfully inspiring document but it is sadly unlikely to be read by many of the laity, ..I think it could usefully be broken down into more digestible chunks and presented to congregations as 'homily instalments'.

A) Do you agree that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue our Vision?

YES – but...

- What does the vision "...to evangelise our diocese" actually mean? The sentence on the Introduction page seems to encapsulate this: "To Proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in Essex and East London" but the document as a whole seems to be quite inward-looking, with "our diocese" often appearing instead of "our wider community".
- Too much emphasis on structure. Without wishing to underestimate the extent of the logistical exercise of matching diminishing numbers of clergy to new clusters of parishes, and the possibility of introducing, for example, communion services and other alternative forms of worship to supplement some masses, I would have thought that was the 'easier' part of the vision to be achieved, with renewal presenting a deeper challenge.

B) Are you satisfied that the 12-Point Plan for Renewal covers the right strands of work?

YES – but...

- **Formation:** .. there is a specific, long-term need (inter)-nationally to train priests to be more effective in their preaching. .. in the free churches where preaching is generally, though not always, more effective than what I have experienced in the Catholic Church...
- **Young People:** The document says "Everyone says we need to do more for and with the young people in our diocese but there are few ideas to take forward". Surely the ideas need to come from the young people themselves, which begs the question "Have we asked them?". Given that the 'drop-out rate' from mass attendance and even the faith itself appears to be high, we need to talk to primary-aged children about what they like (or not!) about attending mass; to teenagers (15-16 year-olds) about how they are influenced by what they learn in RE lessons at school and how they perceive the relevance of their faith to the secular world in which they will spend most of their adult lives; and perhaps also to talk to those in their mid-20s and early 30s about where they are in their journey of faith (or why they have lapsed from it). This, I think, would help us to understand why we lose so many young people once the potentially guiding influence of a Catholic school is no longer present, rather than simply surmising as to why they become disaffected with the Church and faith in general. ...



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C) Are you satisfied that the Framework provides a good model for us to Restructure our Diocese?

YES – but...

- As the Anglican Church has found, creating clusters of parishes overseen by a single priest (male or female!) is really applying a sticking plaster to a broken leg. If Pope Francis (or one of his successors) were eventually able to move the church into the 21st century and achieve acceptance of women priests and married clergy (in addition to the ex-Anglicans!), that would address the needs of those women who feel a vocation to the priesthood and of men who feel a vocation to the priesthood and to marriage and it might just result in further vocations. I am puzzled that, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis appears to rule out discussion of this subject.

the structures proposed need to be discussed and broadly agreed by parishioner groups throughout the Diocese.. modification to the models can then be proposed discussed and agreed on at diocesan level. It is essential that the agreed contributions of parishioners are respected and equally essential the each proposed Location determines its own best way forward.. the most important way to get things started, in a constructive way, is for the parishes and groups in the agreed Locations proposed to set up joint working groups to discuss and decide how things will work in their Location. It will be a vital new working together of priests and parishioners which will pave the way for the future (paving the way for priests to be able to concentrate on spiritual development and the provision of the Sacraments across the Location; the parishioners to organise, run and administer the new parish council in the Location).

..the teaching of our Faith in our schools needs to ensure that pupils have a thorough grounding in its understanding and practice, something which seems to have declined over the past 30/40 years.

..it is vital to ensure that parents too are brought into these developments; as also with the adoption of the proposal that Confirmation is celebrated at an earlier age than currently, say at twelve years, with specific preparation beginning during the first year at Secondary school.

..it will be important to set up working groups in each Location to help impart the teaching of the Faith for parishioners and especially parents who are vital to this process.

Q.A

Yes, ..striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue our Vision. ..surprised that the laity does not get a chance to input after this point. ... we are not accustomed to having a voice. The situation is also a grave one to face and it did not help that the timeline was unclear.

Q.B



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Within the Strands of Work – in order to function well, we should have a good social ethos in our churches, we should develop this aspect more so that we can come to know one another better; this goes a long way to making church a place of welcome and sharing with people with whom we have something precious in common; perhaps this could be added to the strands. So often, we see that something is happening – in another church or school, but there is no reason why we cannot have more events in our own church and church hall, these can take the form of dances and socials or talks/holy films – we need to have a Social Committee.

Caritas – it would be good if there was a system of pastoral care for parishioners; and hopefully lay people could help. There are probably many unidentified needs.

Youth - it would be good if we could involve the youth in projects within the church and/or local community, this would prove to be a win win situation, developing their own sense of belonging and spirituality, discovering what it is we are really about - helping people in need...

Vocations – It is good that there is a vocations website; many people are not aware if there is an age limit when it comes to a vocation, possibly there is a discretionary aspect to this! The consecrated life option or thoughts of becoming a Deacon may not come into the mind so easily without some prompting; not everyone has a computer still yet; it is still a good idea to use posters and adverts and hold talks in addition to the website.

We have to remember that the Plan is a projection and stay prayerful that it will not come to fruition.

Computer links – I am glad that there are some computer links with information.

Q.C

cannot feel pleased about the prospect of churches closing, but I can see the logic and wisdom that has been applied.

Sharing of resources in the Diocese

Polish Priests perform Sunday masses across the Diocese at many of our main churches. (in fact across the country) There may be a way to utilise these priests in future plans, also they need to be involved in our process as it may impact what they are doing.

I also believe some parishes may be showing a decline in church attendance numbers but this may just be because the polish community are attending their own mass so have dropped off the figures, but they are still attending Sunday masses at our churches and should be included in the overall head counts.

..from a [school] Governor



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My contribution and commentary are only meant to be positive, helpful come from the context of engagement with and for younger people and the sometimes disillusionment of middle aged Catholics, like myself, who feel the church has little connection with us anymore. I feel desperately sad about this

...our Schools... are very good, they are gradually losing the practising faith base via the removal of transport to faith based schools by ECC. This is something the diocese was heavily lobbied about at the time and the negative changes predicted are coming to pass. I have been a Governor .. for over 6 years and now a foundation Governor and I see the change. We have catholic schools who may be **catholic schools in name only, in a fairly short period of time** if we don't support them to drive up their practising catholic applications.

We are now facing with the situation where we have far fewer priests than we used to have and that decline looks like getting worse, for all the reasons we understand. We have to look towards how other more rural parishes have dealt with these issues and it is not about the priest working til they drop. So "the people of the parish" need to be asked to step up and look outwards towards embracing the community. This will be done in many ways traditionally seen as the role of our priest.

New lay leadership is crucial but this needs to be wider than currently and engage people new to parish leadership and engagement and this in itself will send out positive messages and attract more people to help/ engage / lead.

Travelling Mission?

Revisit allowing former priests who are now married back in.

Hi quality mass with no gimmicks is good evangelisation

Sensitivity is required if closure is to happen

Lay catechists may be hard to find.

The parish gathered ..for a discussion of the Diocesan vision document. The packed parish hall was indicative both of interest and support for a clear strategy; and personal, parish concern for our future.

The prevailing view was that, whilst the parish ..is small, it is very definitely a cohesive, praying community

The document is bold, and greatly welcomed for its intention to provide clarity and a degree of certainty about the future. In response to the questions at the end of the Diocesan draft plan the view is:

For question A Yes

For question B No

For question C No

with the following reasons/comments



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- A. Stated simply, without renewal, we would be restructuring for continuing decline, so the linking of renewal and restructuring is fundamental.
- B. Our negative answer reflects only the view that the plan does not go far enough. By far the most vociferous comments at our parish meeting related to the feeling that our Diocese, indeed the Church, is allowing itself to be driven in its planning by priestly decline when the necessary human resources are abundantly within. It could be the 13th strand, but more properly the 1st strand of our renewal plan should be to lobby most publicly, as a Diocese, for the ordination of married men. An expanded debate would likely recognise how much richer would be our potential to deliver on kerygma-martyria and leitourgia if ordination was extended to non-stipendiary priests and would argue for more significant review of the potential for women.....
- C. Those in the parish involved with education are very aware that, whilst we would like to think that renewal is an appropriate word in relation to our young people, sadly, evangelisation is often more appropriate. There was strong support for the recognition that restructuring must ensure support around our Catholic secondary schools, beyond the direct link to confirmation. Using similar arguments in relation to the Anointing of the Sick was seen a slightly more tenuous; and potentially lessened by possible NHS reorganisations and moves to smaller hospital units, the extension of care in the community and greater development in end of life care. Nevertheless, the potential for greater planning clarity was greatly welcomed.

Our response as a parish is:

- to believe that an even brighter potential is possible if available human resources can be part of our sacramental future, both development of lay activity and a rethink of priestly ordination, and
- to commit our very prayerful community to continuing to organise ourselves and our parish to provide the necessary support for a resident priest with other responsibilities or particular needs
- to argue strongly that our continued future as a parish is the key to
 - a. our community being practically able to continue its religious practice and
 - b. our ability to sustain the work that the parish does to provide wider support for parishioners.

A) DO YOU AGREE THAT STRIVING FOR RENEWAL & RESTRUCTURING IS A GOOD WAY TO PURSUE OUR VISION?

Yes.



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B) ARE YOU SATISFIED THAT THE 12-POINT PLAN FOR RENEWAL COVERS THE RIGHT STRANDS OF WORK?

Yes.

C) ARE YOU SATISFIED THAT THE FRAMEWORK PROVIDES A GOOD MODEL FOR US TO RESTRUCTURE OUR DIOCESE?

Yes.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Working with religious orders

“It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that we could get a new religious order in the diocese”.

Bringing in further religious orders is not a ‘silver bullet’ solution, and requires strategic planning and management. This is a solution that could bring unexpected problems as well as benefits, including:

- Conscious or unconscious gender bias (which automatically limits a parish’s potential)
- Clericalist parish models based on other cultures which do not fit with the principles of the Stewardship programme
- Lower awareness of the Stewardship programme than is likely to exist in parishes run by secular priests
- Disengagement the Diocese in general (at a time when more will be needed);
- A generally lower level of commitment to a community’s future.

... incoming orders need to commit to the vision of the Diocese for the future *before* they are engaged, and expectations need to be clearly set in relation to how parishes are to be run, and how missionary priests will be expected to work with the Diocese. Incoming missionaries will need education on the Stewardship programme.

The Diocese will need to make changes to itself, and carefully consider what it, specifically, needs to do

*Renewal Strand 5: “a strand of work aimed at assisting our priests and lay people. The new reality will be that they will each be working differently and they will be working together in a new relationship. If we are to love one another, **we must care for each other through this process.**”*



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- It would be good to see more development of this idea within the draft plan, because some of our communities are already visibly vulnerable at this early stage. It would be good to have comfort that the Diocese is specifically working on strategies for supporting us.
- The current proposition seems to be to leave parishes within locations to sort out their own solutions. This is not going to be helpful in the case of my parish, where we are not in a fit state to take on projects such as church closures and realignment of communities. Other parishes are already clear that they would not be able to work with us, or merge with us.
- The Diocese must have oversight of what is going on in “locations”, and, where a community is not in good shape, the Diocese has to be prepared to intervene and provide direction. This work needs to start right now in the case of very weak parishes.
- without specific support from the Diocese, weak parishes are going to be isolated by the other (stronger) parishes.
- suggest that decisions about the realignment of communities should **not** be taken until all the parishes within a “location” have broadly aligning and robust processes - especially in the areas of communication and governance (e.g. PPC, etc.) - and that they are all able to demonstrate some tangible progress in terms of reducing their parish priest’s workload. That would be a much better basis for difficult decisions to be made, and would support all the parishes without sidelining the weak ones. (The alignment work, ultimately, be supportive for relationships between parishes in that it would oblige them to work together in a focused way prior to decision-making.)

The feeling that comes across most forcefully from our communities is the need to keep both places open and available for the people there.

In common with many other smaller, rural or outlying communities they feel, despite reassurances to the contrary, that they are marginalised and overlooked in the planning. This generates a feeling of uncertainty and apprehension and to some extent a foreboding that the ‘inevitable will happen’ regardless of their responses.

It was these communities, among others, who voiced the fact that the physical buildings stands as an evangelizing presence in the wider community.

While accepting that the youth and hospitalised are important, emphasis has also been placed on the Mass as preeminent among the Sacraments and obviously the central act of Christian worship and therefore the lifelong faithful need also to be prioritised.

Bearing this in mind our communities have had an increase in Mass attendance and people added to the lists of the ministries Readers and Holy Communion.



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Many people in our communities have voiced a desire for a mission and opportunities to learn more about their faith along with the desire that it be done locally, necessitating an itinerate team of leaders/educators/evangelisers!

Again, in common with other discussions, the question of married priests was voiced and we watch with interest the Pope's movement towards women deacons.

One last concern is that changes would be implemented too soon.

1. Do you agree that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue our vision?

Overwhelming yes, good ideas and comprehensive document

2. Are you satisfied that the 12 point plan for Renewal covers the right strands of work?

In general YES, however it was felt that some strands could be consolidated and maybe Formation and Evangelisation could be combined.

There was strong support for including a strand for Family Life.

What plans are in place for an evangelisation strategy at diocese level? How will people be trained to evangelise and also to lead formation for Catholic adults?

3. Are you satisfied that the Framework provides a good model for us to Restructure our Diocese?

More information needed to understand how this impacts on our parish.

We would like to see how our mass attendance (and those of our neighbours) compares with other locations in the diocese to get a sense of where we are likely to be in terms of restructuring

This model may suggest that we link with ... but significant concerns about how people would travel to and from the Church.

How would our own church be used?

Aging population and how would that affect travel and accessibility?

Bus services have changed and often they do not have the opportunity to attend Mass if 'drivers' are not available, again we are relying on a few people for transport.

Massive emotional change – how will the Diocese help people cope – what support will be available?

Mass attendance is down – running satellite churches – who has overall responsibility?



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*Is this Framework based on an existing model e.g. A&E departments, can we learn from others experience?
Changing patterns of population*

A. Vision.

We agree that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue the Vision as the Diocese and our Parish needs renewing, and with the declining number of priests, restructuring is inevitable.

B. 12 point plan for Renewal.

We are satisfied that the Plan covers the right strands of work. We have a few specific comments:

1. The Formation is by far the most important part of the plan, being the foundation of the other 11 strands. If people's faith is not deepened, broadened and strengthened the rest of the plan will struggle. In the introduction (p8) it is claimed that although there are 250,000 Catholics only 125,000 attend Mass. In Shelley Weddell's book "Forming Intentional Disciples", she estimates that probably only 5% of parishoners have really committed to Christ. If true, that would mean 2,500 people in the whole of our Diocese. There is an obvious need to help those others. There are numerous books and course available but from our own experience. Two from CaFE are very helpful, The Big Picture, and The Gift. The last three Popes, but Francis in particular have been encouraging Baptism in The Spirit. The Bishop of East Anglia has funded training days for this and we think it would be appropriate here. It would be helpful if priests had their own Baptism in The Spirit course so that they can be renewed and be open to the charisms which are given to all, priests and laity alike, for the building up of the Church. We can't be fruitful without Him!

We have also read about other resources available for helping parishes become more missionary ie RELIT(DVD course) and Fr James Mallon's book 'Divine Renovation' which are being looked at by other dioceses.

2 -12. No additional comment.

C. Restructuring.

We broadly agree with the four Framework proposals... a solution to where to put the church will be difficult. There is due to be a very major housing development... Would it be worth exploring the possibility of building a new, large church complex with modern facilities and plentiful parkingand sell off the existing churches..

In existing parishes which in the future will not have a resident priest, we feel it is very important that these communities remain intact as places of pray and worship so that



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they can be effective evangelisers in the places that they live and be involved with the other Christian churches in that locality.

Although it is not mentioned in the Plan, thought perhaps ought to be given to having visiting priests from other countries.

The only reason for existence of the clergy is to serve the People of God.

1 The guiding principle of Renewal and Restructuring must be to promote the people of God as they are in reality: gathered in small local groups through the whole of Essex and the London Boroughs.

Next I hope you will revisit the understanding of Sacrament and a Sacramental church. A layman told you at that meeting that the church itself is **the root** sacrament. That means the action in and of and constituted by the faithful in all the scattered gatherings through the Diocese is the Sacramental Church in action.

2 These people need to be fed with Word and the Bread of the Eucharist where they are. That is the job of the clergy. Pope Francis constantly tells us priests to find the mud on our boots and the smell of the sheep as we return home. Not to sit as organising executives.

Most of us priests in the Diocese do wear these muddy boots, and live in such proximity to our “sheep”.

3 You mentioned the need for law. Yes, but read particularly Amoris Laetitia. It is a very different understanding of law from that widely prevalent today. Above all it involves moving away from clerical power and control. Have we understood what the bishop is saying in his insistence on Discernment? We have to enable and empower the laity to take over much of what priests are doing today as they “run” parishes..

4 Many participants on September 30th voiced reasons why the choice of hospitals and schools as primary locations is unsound. Patients are swiftly discharged from hospitals to get better or find support in long illness at home: hence within the care of parishes. Homes and Care-homes are crucial. Not hospitals. Similarly the changing role of schools must be recognised. We do not trust them to prepare children for Communion or for Confirmation. Both are done in parish. Think: Why?



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Please find our comments on the Bishop's Document – 'Working together to Evangelise our Diocese' –

A) YES- agree that Renewal and Restructuring is necessary, but you have stated that *'developing people's relationship with Christ must be top of the list'* -

so how do we do this with less Mass centres, shrinking numbers attending those centres and very few young people engaging with Church?

Perhaps by not being so 'Priest orientated' and releasing the Laity to perform so many more of the functions that create a vibrant Christian family, forward looking and inclusive. We should be encouraged to interact with other Christian Denominations and make use of each other's resources and not have our Priests deny and interfere with that participation.

Some communities are completely strangled by their Priests in this current situation, we can only assume this will get worse unless there is a strong, bold move to retrain Priests. There has to be a working model for an elected Parish Council, with sub-committees to take on running a Parish, aiming to make that first statement of yours a reality.

In a world where we hear of Communities receiving Mass only once a year, we have something to learn about how they keep their 'relationship with Christ' alive.

B) YES – but most people do no more than attend Mass on Sunday and believe that is enough to live a Christian life. We need to engage them in the precepts of reading the Bible, Prayer and knowing of and using the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. There needs to be much more advertising, much more encouragement, much more information of all that is available to us, for our participation, in our Deaneries and Parishes. A better local system could be employed than just a Newsletter page each week, websites need to be operational and user friendly.

For instance, the website you mention alluding to Proclaim 15, is excellent, but has been totally neglected in our Parish, due to lack of enthusiasm or direction – just an example of how a Lay person could manage and exploit that area of evangelisation.

C) YES – but there seems to be no mention of any Ecumenical benefits that could be attained by working with our Christian Brothers and Sisters and of breaking down barriers, especially as many of them are so good at evangelisation already and we often share Christian duties, such as Night Pastors or Soup Runs. An example of working together I saw recently was in the Diocese of East Anglia, at Bowthorpe. The Mass centre there, (on the site of a 600 hundred year old ruin of a Catholic Church) was used by all the Christian Denominations even Catholics, until a few years ago when for some reason we pulled out. In country areas this may be a model worth exploring as there are



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often under used 'church' buildings, but it is essential to have a strong community to serve and aid a visiting Priest.

Thank you for such an informative document and for the reminder of the Proclaim 15 website, having discovered it we are now telling others to get reading!

We Catholics are hungry for more of Christ in our lives, hungry to see more people in our churches, hungry to welcome families and hungry to be more involved in our liturgy- help us achieve this by empowering the Laity!

1. There is much talk of evangelising the diocese, but no statement of what that means. That would have been very helpful. Are we, for example, just talking about the Catholics in the Diocese? The Vision implies not...
2. There are hints in the document that we must look beyond individual parishes. .. Christianity works best in small communities, and parishes are already large! ...Parishes are, and must continue to be our local family – whether or not they have their own priest.
3. It is stated that: "By 2035 we estimate that we will have 52 priests who are going to be based in 33 locations. By 2025 (in only eight years) we will have 76 able to be in 57 locations."

This assumption permeates the whole plan, and yet is not questioned.

In particular, the current model of 'the priesthood' is not questioned.

There are complementary models – married priests, allowing priests to marry, the role of the deacon and of religious, women deacons etc.

Are there sacramental and other duties that are currently performed by priests that could be undertaken by others?

Are such matters being considered, and if so by whom?

Pope Francis seems to have encouraged Bishops to make innovative suggestions.

4. Regarding restructuring, there is no particular need for one solution for the whole diocese. Different approaches might be adopted to suit local needs in different parts of the Diocese.

5. Framework Proposals

Hospital ministry requires the minister to be in easy reach, but not necessarily on the doorstep/in the local parish.

And responsibility for sacramental preparation presently lies with parishes and not schools.



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So the logic of basing key locations around schools and hospitals – rather than around catholic communities, or centres of population – seems flawed. Naturally, they will often be similar, but that is not the point.

6. First proposal: There is nothing fixed about needing three priests in a key location, or of those locations being served from two parishes – they might be sensible guidelines, but will not necessarily best serve the situation – let's not create unnecessary rules, but allow the Bishop more discretion.
The same applies to the remaining proposals.
7. There is no mention in the document of clericalism... the inappropriately significant role played by some priests in the life of their parish (to the detriment of lay involvement, and not in the interests of effectiveness or efficiency). That is alive and well in our Diocese, and represents a real risk to the plan. Another strand of the plan should address this.
8. As a generality, the plan reads ..as being very much focussed on the Diocesan view and what should be done by the Diocese. That is fine, but the Parish view and what needs to be done by each individual Parish (with Diocesan support as necessary) is crucial.

Executive Summary:

Parishioners ..were invited to attend one of two Open Forum meetings ..to discuss the consultative document.

Overall, the responses received from them over the following ten days were very positive as indicated in the following:-

Question (A)

It was agreed unanimously that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue our Vision.

A variety of 'points of detail' were given.

In most cases these were repeats of details given in response to the Diocesan Questionnaire which was completed in December 2016 and which now form part of our Parish Pastoral Development Plan.

Other points which were not given then, which are considered relevant to the 12 point plan, have been included in the answer to Question (B) overleaf.



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Question (B)

The majority of responses indicated agreement that the 12 point plan for Renewal covers the right strands of work. Others felt that details were missing, or needed emphasising in the 12 point plan.

These, together with the responses given to Question (A) are included overleaf.

Question (C)

The majority of responses indicated agreement that the Framework provides a good model for us to 'Restructure our Diocese'. One response indicated that it was the wrong model to use, but failed to provide details of any alternative models that could be considered.

Two responses indicated locations we should consider for aligning with other parishes. These are highlighted overleaf.

Specific points of detail received

Question (B)

- **Renewing Catholic values in the Diocese;** As a Diocese we should recognise that 'free-thinking liberalism' in the church and in society in general has, in recent years, diluted the essence of being a committed Catholic. **The Diocese needs to develop pastoral programmes that re-emphasise the values of:-**
 - (1) Attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligations** (this is sometimes watered down by the accepted idea that missing Mass can be made up for in other ways);
 - (2) Friday abstinence from meat** (a directive which has been reintroduced but requires re-emphasising);
 - (3) Standing up more for Catholic teaching in the Diocese of Brentwood,** in particular on the highly controversial and political subjects of open support for Lesbian/Gay movements etc.
- **Renewing Catholic family life;** As a Diocese we should develop programmes that encourage families to participate in church life. When parents are involved, children are more likely to get involved. Thereby faith is passed from generation to generation.



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- **By 2025, consolidate weekday and weekend Masses** in conjunction with neighbouring parishes we are aligned with. This will provide a practical solution for Mass cover in the new locations.
- **The Diocese must take active steps to ensure the voice of the Catholic Church is heard** and listened to, particularly when it comes to political solutions to develop the number of faith schools in our future locations.
- **More emphasis should be given in the 12 point plan** to encourage vocations to the Permanent Diaconate. This should be expanded as a matter of urgency.

Question (C)

Future financing of change; Whatever decisions are made in connection with parishes, it is essential that parish assets, in particular parish churches and halls, are not considered as the prime means to achieve the objectives in the short or medium terms.

The Parish Priests and Stewards met to consider ..on 30 September. A short questionnaire was then given out to Parishioners. The response rate from Parishioners has been very low.

Parish reflections

As it will happen with many parishes in the Diocese, there is a fear that [our church] will close and that that is a given as it does not feature in the principles, set out in "Working Together to Evangelise Our Diocese".

The nuances in the document of putting Diocese before Parishes is difficult for Parishioners .. to comprehend ..

The possibility to see the Parish close is causing huge concern and some anger among some Parishioners that is unlikely to abate as time goes on. This has been reflected in some of the oral and written feedback. One Parishioner said:

"Basically the Bishop thinks that by closing down [our church h thinks we could go elsewhere]but they don't think about the older people who would find it difficult to travel there. It all seems a way of making money to sell the land where the Church stands because of the low numbers attending Mass...What is acceptable to God?."



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There are also differing views among some Parishioners about whether greater involvement of the laity is a good thing or not. For example one response said:

“Please pass on to the Parish Council the information I received from parishioners that they are very unhappy with this situation as our predecessors saved enough to build the Church and Parish Hall to benefit us. They also say that if that happens, many people will stop going to Church altogether, and that would be the Church's fault, because they were not given duty of care. They do not want lay people to do some of the Priest's jobs.”

Specific questions

A) Do you agree that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue our Vision?

A qualified YES. We can see merit in the approach but do not feel that these are necessarily complementary strategies. Clusters of Priests is potentially a good model. One could also argue that, as drafted currently, Renewal is being presented to try to make the Restructuring more palatable.

It would be better to be honest and upfront with all in the Diocese about the challenge of Priest numbers and to explain how Vocations is going to be addressed positively as a key part of the Strategy other than being one of the 12 points of Renewal.

One Parishioner said more should be thought about “the risk of losing our sense of catholic community with the closure or reduction in services - for any Parish. Linked to this is of course the focus of the sacraments, or lack of. To raise a family in an area without a nearby church where all sacraments are regularly seen, practiced and experienced is surely putting at risk a central part of our child's spiritual life. (family life is challenging enough..)” We should have a Vision for our Diocese that is about the Sacramental Church, and build from that.

The proposals currently seem to relate only to a few of the Sacraments for a few of the people: Anointing the Sick in hospitals and those who attend Catholic Secondary schools in a few areas. What about all the other Sacraments and all the other people?

B) Are you satisfied that the 12-Point Plan for Renewal covers the right strands of work?

No. There is mainly a focus on money and property and the able bodied in the 12 point plan. The messages of Jesus seem to be lost. There is not a focus on communities or families, the poor, elderly or the disabled. Yet these were the focus for Jesus. Disabled children and adults should not be an add on or seen only through the lens of Charity.

That is not what the law says including Human Rights, Equality or related to Special Educational Needs and Disability (in the Children and Families Act 2014).

For example, do the Youth groups include all disabled children and young people equally? Does the Diocese believe in Disability Equality and if so how does it evidence that? Saying that all disabled children and young people are in special schools is not the national law for Disability.



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There is also no focus on the effect of closures and change on the continuity of the faith. This will and is already having a major impact on some Parishes and Parishioners. The Parishioners are also very aware of the tenets of Canon Law about who the Parish belongs to. Top down directions are unlikely to help especially when there are such deficiencies in the Diocesan Planning.

C) Are you satisfied that the Framework provides a good model for us to Restructure our Diocese?

A definite NO. We do not see any proper analysis of ranges of options or models. Some found the descriptions confusing. We do not understand or agree with the focus on catholic secondary schools and hospitals.

Have you discerned how the NHS is discerning for itself in its move from hospitals to person centred care in communities and hospices?

Vocations may not come from Catholic Secondary schools. What is the strategy to increase the number of vocations?

The children of many Catholic families are in non catholic schools and they feel alienated by these proposals. Additionally, Catechesis is for Parishes not for schools. What does “good” look like for Parish working in the future? What Catholic values are important? What values do you want our Diocese, resources and structures to have? Are new proposed structures, Parish options and resources going to match? Are all resources equal?

We had a parish meeting chaired by Father ..and the general comment was that it was a very well prepared and useful document. Well done.

Answering your specific questions

A – Yes

B – No.

C – Yes & No – not palatable but what will be.

A. Looking at the Plan for Renewal and working through your document:

1. Agree – underline “Developing people’s relationship with Christ”
2. How do we select the leaders. The priests will be even more remote from the parishioners. We need lay intermediaries, promoted by the parishioners, appointed by the diocese.
3. In this parish we are very aware of the financial situation of our own funds BUT not the diocesan ones and we certainly do not understand them.
4. Property agree. We need lay advice/expertise.



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5. Agree. We feel that appraisals would be a useful tool. We are aware that the bishop meets and speaks to priests but the bishop does not necessarily get any feedback from parishioners before doing so.
6. Agreed
7. Our response is "Bring it on"... We are also very aware that the parents need to be involved and educating as well as the students.
8. Absolutely critical. We never really hear of the Youth Team in our parish, although it is mentioned in newsletters.
9. Absolutely agree. Our parish had specific links which have been diluted recently but all agreed
10. It all stems from 8 above. Youth work.
11. We already do a lot, but always room for improvement and particularly critical in larger parish set ups BUT who leads it and chooses the leader?
12. ...the Ordinariate have brought tremendous benefits .. with the number of priests etc., but also perception of separation – them and us.

In principle we agree that changes are urgently required within our diocese to deal with the shortage of priests and the issues arising from that. Through our consultation process we identified areas where we would wish to cooperate with other parishes in the diocese and hopefully be the light of our Catholic faith within our community to help with evangelisation. We are keen to continue the initiatives already in place in our parish to involve the laity more in the running of the church and we feel strongly that families need more support to effectively pass on the faith to their children.

We do, however, have some concerns with the Renewal and Restructuring programme. Why, for example focus on the sacraments of confirmation and of the sick when the sacrament of the Eucharist is the one that feeds our faith regularly and develops us throughout our lives? We should guard against concentrating our faith into a couple of moments in our lives. The future of our Catholic Schools is in jeopardy. They are being eroded by successive governments and our increasingly more secular society. Is there any correlation between the planned MATS being proposed by the diocese and the proposals being put forward in this document? Will the reorganisation of the NHS have an impact? Making schools and hospitals central to the Renewal and Restructuring programme could present issues in the future.

To maintain and strengthen any organisation renewal is essential but what will success look like? Renewal is a mixture of the spiritual and the practical and we need to keep the Eucharist at the heart of our sacramental church and at the centre of our faith.



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Practically we feel that it would be a big mistake to close any parishes completely. If there is no physical presence of our Catholic faith in parts of the diocese it diminishes the evangelical role we could have in the future. The Church will be smaller and control is therefore more likely to remain with the clergy. Rather, should we not trust the laity and examine how best to train and organise the laity to manage parishes? Surely the laity is mature enough as Catholics to share the work of Christ in leading the people?

We recognise that the 12 strand plan for Renewal is not in any particular order and that all are important but the culture of the Church and the diocese is top/down and many of the decisions cannot be made at the parish level. However, it would be a start if the clergy and the laity agreed to value each other and work together to build on their strengths.

Depending on our experiences throughout life our spiritual understanding and knowledge varies greatly. We welcome the use of more resources but we are concerned that there will not be enough catechists and spiritual leaders with the ability to relate to different genders, cultures and ages. Who is going to train the trainers?

For leaders the example that has been set is one of service but we need to determine the criteria for leadership and their educational needs.

We would like more transparency with regard to finances and property and the information should be clear and accessible so that we can take on board the responsibilities of stewardship. Expected outcomes will and should be challenging for the priests and the people but who will make the decisions?

We welcome the broader interpretation of vocations and recognise the importance of our young people and how we engage with them, value them, encourage them to live out their vocations within and outwith our parishes and to develop in them an understanding and appreciation of the role of Caritas.

Summary.

As a general comment it must be noted that it has proved difficult to engage the opinions of the wide spectrum of parishioners that worship at [our church]. In general, meetings have been poorly attended with sadly very few of the 'new faces' that we see regularly at the Parish. Therefore, it would be unwise to consider this response as fully representative of the Parish. That said, I have compiled the following from both input at our meetings and additional information sent directly to me.



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Overall there has been a general, albeit silent, concurrence to the plans although there is also a recognition that we must continue to pray for both vocations and, through the Holy Spirit, the capability to be Evangelisers.

There have been some comments that this does appear to be a 'managerial exercise' in which the language is that of commerce rather than 'church'. We are conscious of the need to change but communication of each of the stages is key and we must ensure that those channels of communication are opened first.

- A. Do you agree that striving for Renewal and Restructuring is a good way to pursue our Vision?

Answer. Yes – but with some reservations.

Broadly speaking, there is a recognition that we need not only to keep pace with changes but also to plan ahead for the inevitable reduction in both clergy and possibly reduction in the number of parishioners/parishes. However, there is a great deal of inertia within the congregation and this needs to be carefully considered whenever change is contemplated. We can only move at a pace determined by the people and they will need time to both reflect and consider all these issues. As previously mentioned, engagement is key to this process but for many, attendance at weekly Mass is all they feel able to do.

One other aspect that has also been raised is that of the involvement of the substantial Polish Chaplaincy. This seems to operate as a 'parish within a parish'. There is a feeling within the parish that they should now be fully integrated.

- B. Are you satisfied that the 12 Point Plan for Renewal covers the right strands of work?

Answer. Yes – but with some reservations.

There was a call for much more of a 'root and branch' review of what we do in the Parish. Following St Francis' (attrib) words (to preach the Gospel often and when necessary to use words) there is a much greater demand for the church, as a body, to be outward looking at where we can do charitable works. Perhaps make our parishes more available to those passing by where possible, to keep our churches more open. There was a demand to ensure that we both generate and maintain the involvement of younger people in the parish. Much of the work



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done in our parish falls to the few, generally ageing, groups. I suspect that this is mirrored in many other parishes. Therefore, youth involvement is of paramount importance. The other aspect of concern is for vocations. This reflects on not only vocations to the clergy and religious life but to Marriage, Single Life, caring and teaching etc.

It may transpire that not all strands are of equal importance to each individual parish. In some cases, therefore it may be better to concentrate on the 'vital few' than the 'general many'.

- C. Are you satisfied that the Framework provides a good model for us to restructure our Diocese?

Answer. Yes – but with reservations.

Our Parish is served by Priests [from a religious order]. We require more clarity how this will impact given the support of this and other communities. Once the draft plan is published we trust this will become clearer.

We recognise that the strategy to cope with the anticipated reduction in priests is, at this stage, well thought out. However, we also recognise that, as stated, our plans will need to 'be constantly monitored and flexed as we go along'.

One response simply stated that we should be really radical - ordination of women and married priests.

Regarding the remaining six:

Question A received 6 'YES'

Comments: Bad timing of the Bishop to move priests right in the middle of Renewal.

Question B received 5 'YES' and 1 'NO'

Comments: Enthusiasm drops due to reorganisation of parish priests. Also, regarding Strands 3 and 4, given that the survey responses showed that parishioners have limited understanding of finances and property, the diocese should give guidance and direction to parishes.

Question C received 5 'YES' and 1 'NO'

Comments: Agree that change is necessary and the old structure is not working well.



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1. Yes

2. Yes. The 12 point plan renewal is a big undertaking and I expect it will take place over a period of time. I think the focus should include, not only drafting the plan, but it should include practical help/advice on how to implement them, how to keep the parishioners engaged and keep the momentum going.

3. Yes, in a way. I do understand the rationale behind allocating priests to high concentration area as well as schools and hospitals. But these are mostly in urban/London areas, so one would expect a higher concentration of churches in East London. However, this means that there would be fewer churches in certain areas in Essex and I recognise the difficulty for parishioners living in areas in Essex where they have to travel further than usual to be able to go to mass (weekday or weekend) or to avail of confession. This applies especially to those who are elderly and who may not be able to drive (for health, age or whatever reason) and have to rely on public transport, (which are infrequent on weekends!). If some of the churches in East London are closed in the future, they could most likely access other churches within Westminster Diocese easier even with public transport. I wonder whether it is feasible for some of the east London churches to be 'reassigned' to Westminster Diocese without losing any of its Diocesan Priest to the Westminster.

A. Yes, we agree. The only problem at this point is that the VISION didn't come across. And if it does, it on reflect the structural and didn't reflect the spiritual.

B. The struggles facing "Family", seems to be overlooked. The nature in which that important key word is undermined is fundamental in any spiritual renewal, which should precede structural change

C. Yes and a comment. The framework must guard against talking about the past. The future must be that which leads on innovation, theology and technology to reach every corner of the world. Equally, Biblical words like "the poor" and "disciples" etc were noticeable missing in this discourse.

Question A: Yes we agree that striving for Renewal and Restructuring as proposed is a good way to pursue our Vision.



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Comment:

The idea of renewal before restructuring is uplifting and encouraging. The idea of change then becomes positive and something to look forward to.

Question B: Yes we agree with the 12 point plan for Renewal.

Comment:

Good communication between priests and the laity is essential during this period so that parishioners are not left in isolation or ignorance.

paragraph 5 - Priests and people:

We have never understood why most Parish Priests feel that they should administer the non- liturgical parts of a parish.

Most, if not all, parishes will have members who are better qualified in building maintenance, contract negotiation, finance, etc.

The parish priest should deal with the spiritual and liturgical side of the parish and rely on the parishioners to deal with all other aspects of the parish.

Question C: Yes, we agree that the Framework for Restructuring provides a good model.

Comment:

Regarding geographic coverage of areas outside the main areas of population (e.g. the Tendring peninsular, as that is where we are) – one concern with eventually less priests (i.e. 2 rather than 3) in an area with a higher than average older population, is that the housebound and although not perhaps completely housebound, those with diminished mobility, may be marginalised. Careful planning needs to be done to ensure alternative arrangements are made so that these parishioners are not forgotten.

Geographically, it would be logical to build a new larger church centrally in the Dengie area (Latchingdon, Althorn Steeple), but this would have to be ecumenical as well. Any



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proposal to **increase** Mass attendance at Holy Trinity must consider the logistics of the space available and the time constraints therein, especially on a Sunday morning.

Need to bear in mind sharing agreements with C of E

Nowhere near enough clarity on money/ debt

Deacons needed

Use modern technology more/better. In order to prevent the closure of Churches we could have Mass centres from where Mass could be screened to surrounding churches while Eucharistic Ministers could give out Communion. Churches could rotate so it is not always the same Churches that give and receive the screening.

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