



You are *Living Stones*

RENEWAL



“Coming to Him as to a living stone... chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

On the Renewal of the Parochial Structure of the Diocese of Nottingham



You are Living Stones...

Dear Friends,

The year 2010-2011 marks my tenth year amongst you as your Bishop. The past ten years have been a time of real growth in grace, both for me as your Bishop, but also for the Diocese as a whole. We are a people truly blessed in the Diocese of Nottingham; blessed with vibrant faith-filled parishes, outstanding Catholic schools, a youth service which is the envy of many other dioceses, our contribution to the wider community through our chaplaincy work makes a real witness to the Gospel and all of this is thanks to you, the living stones which build up the Church here in the Diocese.

As I reflect on the past ten years, one seminal moment was our Diocesan Assembly in 2003. We invested an enormous amount of time and energy in the assembly knowing that the future of our church in Nottingham was dependent not on what could be imposed on the people, but from what the people drew their life. I wanted it to be a true “conversation” about where we had come from, where we were, and to where was the Lord calling us to go. The three days of the Assembly at Loughborough University were important, but the most important work was the year of prayer and reflection in our communities all over the diocese, thinking, praying talking about the Church.

The Mass which brought the Assembly to a close was a real high point, where nearly 6000 people from all over the diocese came together to worship God and to receive Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist – food for our journey on. For we must always remember that he is our source of life and the goal of our lives, sustaining us daily through his Body and Blood. Christ is the centre of our lives and we as a community of faith are empowered by him to look out into the world and to witness to the Good News of the Gospel. At the end of that Mass we received all the recommendations of the Assembly and set about putting them into practice in our Diocese.

The following year, we drew up a Diocesan Three Year Plan distributed to all our communities to be implemented in their places as best they could. I have always stressed that it was not a *one size fits all* plan, but we should work to our strengths and our weaknesses to implement the greater consciousness of the Diocese, arrived at through the Assembly process, into the local communities. We have completed that three year plan timescale and now we have to begin a new consultation on parishes, priests and their relationship together.

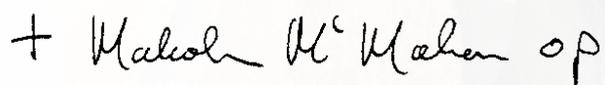
It is very easy to say that there has been little progress over the past ten years, yet we have to be content as the sowers of seeds, not the gatherers of flowers. As I travel around the diocese, celebrating Confirmations and on official parish visitation, I am overwhelmed by the generosity of ordinary parishioners in ensuring the Word of God is heard in their locality. They support the priests of the diocese in their work both within and outside of the church. The smallest task in our communities, done with a generous spirit, is a work of praise and love for God.

Over the next year, I want us to reflect on how we will support each other as communities in the years to come when we will have to face a falling number of priests able to serve in the diocese. It is my intention, as best as I can as your Bishop, to ensure that each Eucharistic community in the diocese has access to a weekly Mass. It is not my intention to close churches and disperse communities; that would be counter-productive to what we aim to achieve. I want us to work together to make sure that everyone, with that generosity of spirit, shares their talents and skills to ensure that each Eucharistic community is able to survive as part of the living Body of Christ, living stones, of our Diocese.

We do not take to change easily, but over the ten years of my time with you, we have already embraced changes of great significance. There are a significant number of parishes without a resident priest who are served from neighbouring parishes. This situation is more common in the diocese now and it is by no means a sign of failure, as the gifts and talents of both parishes have come into play to ensure that the communities, based around the Eucharist, flourish in their own specific way. Many parishes now work together on catechetical courses and other activities. Many of our parishes served from other places by priests have parish sisters living in the presbyteries and they enrich the life of the parish by their spiritual presence and pastoral gifts.

I hope that as we being this prayerful consultation, we should be willing to embrace what is right for the church in our local communities. Always having the Lord as our source of inspiration and goal, we need to make sure that the church in our diocese has a strong basis for building into the future. To do this, we must work together to express that desire of St Peter when he wrote that we *"may be living stones making a spiritual house as a holy priesthood to offer the spiritual sacrifices made acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* Our discipleship means that we are willing to listen to the Word, act on it and offer our gifts and talents to it. We need generous hearts and minds to undertake this work, but with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to build a future which will yield that rich harvest which we began to sow with our Diocesan Assembly.

With all good wishes,



+ Malcolm McMahon OP
Bishop of Nottingham



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SECTION 1

A Biblical Reflection on the Theology of Change

THEOLOGY OF CHANGE

Change is an unavoidable part of life; at times, we welcome it and at other moments, we fear it. The Diocesan Assembly in 2003 along with its Three Year Plan has challenged us to come to terms with change on many levels – in our hearts, in our families, and in our communities of faith. For people of faith, openness to change is a vital part of hearing the Good News and living as disciples of Christ Jesus, for change, in theological terms, must always mean *a renewal of faith*. From a renewal of faith, we are invited to continue to deepen the life of the Church so that we may more effectively be sent out to tell others of the Good News in which we believe, offer them the hope of Jesus Christ and live out the commandments to love God and our neighbour more vibrantly.

When facing change the first challenge is *discernment of God's will*. *Discernment* requires us to ask whether the change is good and necessary. Some things, such as Church doctrine and teaching cannot change. Other things, such as Church discipline and some structures may change depending upon the circumstances and situations they are found in. Discernment, study, and honest dialogue are necessary whenever we face potential change in the Church. After we have gone through *discernment* about any potential change, the second challenge is *openness to implementing necessary changes*. These changes that we seek to identify are those which will enable us both as the Church – the community of disciples – and as individuals to be sustained in our faith and sent out to others to share our hope with them.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON CHANGE

The Road to Emmaus - Luke 24:13-35

“ Now that very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but their eyes were prevented from recognising him.

He said to them, “What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, “You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.” He asked, “What things?” They answered, “All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.”

Then he said to them, “You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?” Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, “It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight.

Then they said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, “The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.”



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DIocese of
NOTTINGHAM

This is one of the most beautiful passages of scripture in the New Testament, and it gives us a model of how to reflect and be changed and be renewed. The disciples are walking away from Jerusalem and are discussing the events of the past few days. The risen Lord comes to meet them, and asks what they are discussing. They stop. Then they relay the facts of what has happened and in the telling of this story, they become experiences. Jesus then explains the scriptures to them about himself, his ministry and his Paschal Mystery. He makes to go on without them, but they ask him to stay and eat with them. In the breaking of the bread, they recognise him and they immediately return to Jerusalem to tell the others about what had happened on the road.

Looking at the story, it does not seem remarkable, but taken in stages it gives a wonderful biblical schema for the process of transformation and change:

Stage One – Prayerful Narrative

The disciples are narrating the events of the past few days to each other; they are talking things over.

- The first stage is to make a “prayerful narrative” of the parish where the history and memory is brought to mind. This will include great positives and negative things; look at where the healing is needed if there are negatives.

Stage Two – Stop, Pause, Reflect

Jesus comes to them and they stop.

- Once this is done, the parish needs to stop; to thank God, to ask forgiveness if necessary and seek the power of the Holy Spirit in prayer to begin to see the way forward, This can be done by a day of recollection or of prayer, or of a period of Exposition in which the “prayerful narrative” is reflected upon. Time is needed for this.

Stage Three - Experience

“...it had been our hope.” This phrase is important as it shows the change from event to experience. It is at this moment that the disciples have interiorised what is important about the last few days.

- Having looked at our past, we now look at what is important in the parish currently. What do we value, what do we cherish?

Stage Four - Tradition

Jesus then tells them about the Tradition; he enfolded their experience within the scriptures about himself. The Tradition of the Church describes the living faith of the Church through history and presently. It helps us to widen our horizons and gain insight from the lives of the saints, the teaching of the Church and living faith of the community of disciples.

- How do we value the Tradition of the Church as expressed in the parish? What do we need to let go of so we can be more collaborative with others? What good practice do we share so we can move forward as partners, not alone?

Stage Five - Remaining a Community

They recognise the need to stay with Jesus and invite him to stay.

- We cannot declare ourselves alone, but recognise and affirm the need to have Christ at the centre of our parish and our collaborative communities.

Stage Six - Celebration

They celebrate at table with him and recognise him for who he is.

- The Eucharistic Celebration is the centre of our lives: it is also the place where all the parish is needs to be celebrated, it is also the place where the needs of the parish are brought so that we can listen attentively to the risen Lord who speaks to us. Reflect on the centrality of the Eucharist in the parish.

Stage Seven - Recognition

They recognise him in the breaking of bread.

- Where is the risen Lord in the community? What do we carry forward to our partners?

Stage Eight - Action

Having recognised him, they return to Jerusalem and “narrate” the facts to the disciples.

- The celebration leads to action (the return) and the cycle begins again with the narration of facts...what significant act are we going to offer as a community to further develop our collaboration and partnership with our neighbours? How are we going to be more effectively sent out to spread the gospel?

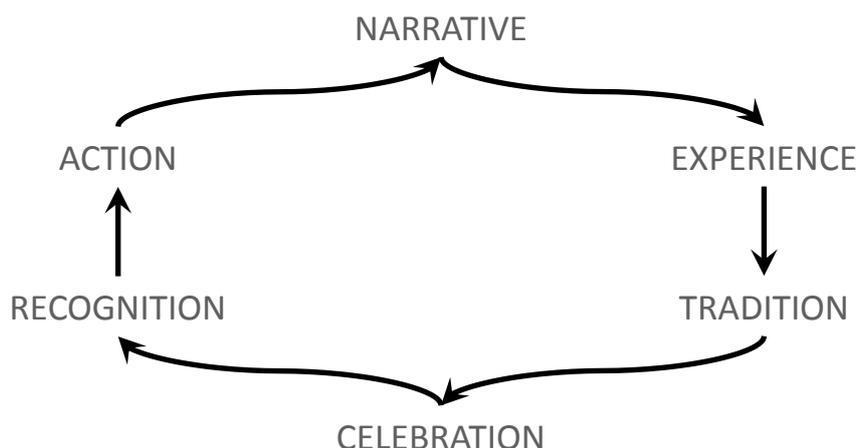


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The story can be summarised as a cycle of significant moments:



This reflection on the Road to Emmaus gives us a framework to root the process which the Bishop is asking us to undertake in prayer. Without prayer, we are simply functionaries who are trying to rationalise a problem. With prayer, we are disciples discerning the will of the Shepherd who wants us to remain part of him so we can bear much fruit (cf John 15:1-17) in the Diocese. The prayer we make roots us in the person of Christ and thus in the living Tradition of the Church (cf. DV 9) as the singular source of all we celebrate and are. These are key points to remember as we move through the process of consultation.

SECTION 2

Our Priestly Resources – Now and into the Future

CURRENT NUMBERS

There are currently 108 parishes in the Diocese of Nottingham, and 90 parish priests.

There are 94 diocesan priests (presbyters) in active ministry, whether in this diocese or elsewhere; the sick are included in this number, but the 34 retired priests are not. This figure also excludes priests incardinated in other dioceses (whether in England & Wales or beyond), religious institutes and societies of apostolic life who are currently working in the diocese. We are grateful for the dedicated service that our religious priests have given to the parishes of the diocese, and hope that this will continue.

There are currently eleven men in priestly formation with a number engaging in pre-seminary discernment organised by the Vocation Directors.

There are 34 permanent deacons, and five in formation for the diaconate.

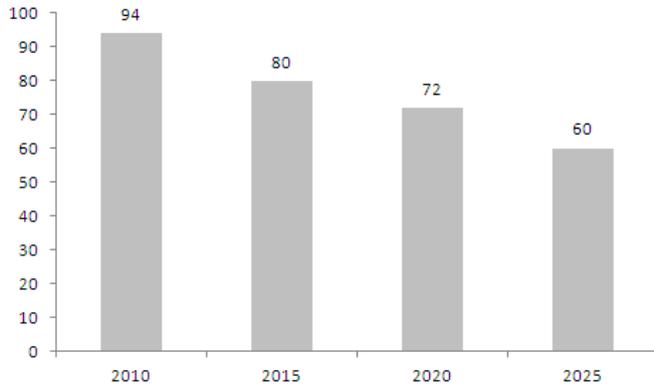
AGE PROFILE

The age profile of those currently in active ministry is as follows:

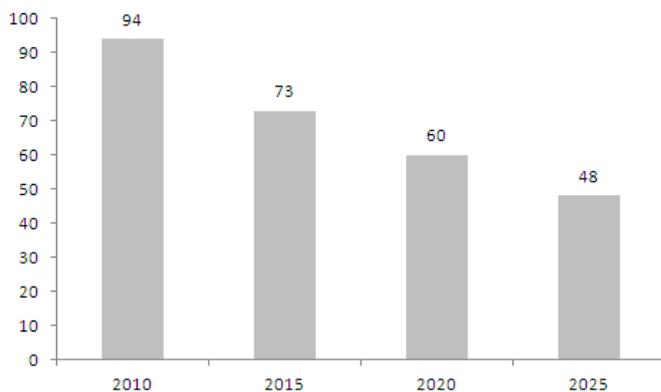
75+:	12	45-54:	22
65-74:	24	35-44:	8
55-64:	28	25-34:	0

FUTURE SCENARIOS

According to the best-case scenario, which assumes that all priests retire from active ministry at 75, and there is one ordination per year:



A medium-case scenario prefigures half of all priests retiring from active ministry at 70, with the rest remaining until 75, and two ordinations every five years:



A worst-case scenario imagines all priests retiring from active ministry at 70, with no ordinations whatsoever in the next fifteen years:



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These figures may give a sense of alarm to us, bearing in mind the number of Eucharistic Communities that form the Diocese. However, we must remember that all of us are called to live out “some definite service” as Blessed John Henry Newman tells us. The discovering of this vocation, literally to be “called out of” – out of our lives, out of our communities, out of our very selves, should always be a source of great joy.

We have to engender a “culture of vocation” within our communities and challenge our young people to listen carefully to the voice of the Lord who is calling them to that definite service. The Church must provide tools to help them go through this process; one by which we discover our vocation, which we call ‘discernment’. Discernment always begins with the individual: no one can ever be told by someone else that they have a vocation. They begin to discover it for themselves particularly in prayer.

This is true for our parishes as well as the individual – what is the vocation of our parish community? How do we bring Christ to the world? Do we encourage young men to train for the priesthood? Do we acknowledge and celebrate those particular vocations in the Church?

Pray for more priests!

THE DIACONATE

The Diocese has been richly blessed by the ministry of our deacons in the various parishes, assisting the Bishop and his priests in promoting the apostolic life amongst all. Deacons have a particular ministry of compassion and charity in the communities in which they work. They proclaim the Word of God within the gathered assembly and then live that Word through their lives of pastoral care and charity beyond the sanctuary. Looking at the role of the deacon in this way, the Church confirms their ministry as a *diaconia of charity*, an outward looking ministry to people and the Church itself proclaiming the Kingdom and nurturing the people in their faith lives.

With this in mind, the Diocese values the integral ministry of the deacon and prays for more men to offer themselves in this particular ministry in the Church. They are ordained for the fullest work of the Diocese, and although coming from particular communities and serving those communities, they should never see their role as “for that parish” but for the wider Church.

The deacons of our Diocese have a precise role to play in our communities, but it is not envisaged that they will become parochial administrators. Each parish will always have an appointed parish priest (whether resident or not) and this priest should be supported by the deacon who will often have a deep and long-seated knowledge of the community into which the priest comes to serve. Deacons should be given the freedom from such responsibility to exercise their proper ministry of charity.

Pray for more deacons!

SECTION 3

The Consultation Process

The key components for facilitating change in the structure of a parish community are prayer, vision and leadership. Here are some principles to underpin this consultation process:

- The Body of Christ is an organic body, which changes and adapts in every age. Therefore change has always been an on-going process for the development, health and well-being of the Church,
- Those involved in the process of consultation need to be discerning and open in a spirit of prayer.
- No one community, parish, school or chaplaincy, can function apart from the rest of the diocese. No priest or community leader can absent themselves from this process.
- Each of our communities has gifts to offer and needs the support and expertise of other communities. No community – no matter how large or financially strong – is exempt from the process.
- Well-trained, competent leadership is a critical building block for the Church of the future. We must look at the training of clergy, religious and lay leaders of our communities into the future.
- Growth and diminishment, change and transformation make sense only against the backdrop of the Death-Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which we experience and celebrate daily in the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharistic aspect of our communities underpins the value of this consultation.



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OUR MISSION AS A CHURCH IN THE DIOCESE

What is the mission of the Church? All of the work we will undertake together must embrace the particular mission of the Diocese of Nottingham, of which all our parishes, chaplaincies, schools and communities are an integral part. We are united by a living faith in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has revealed through his life, death and resurrection the love the Father has for the whole of creation. Our mission is of a singular purpose with many facets: the mission is to serve the proclamation of the Gospel wherever we may be. In proclaiming the living Word of God, we will open up the doors of faith to those who may not have faith, or whose faith is weak. The life of faith leads us to grow in holiness, being schooled by the Holy Spirit blowing through our lives.

The Diocesan Assembly in 2003 and its Implementation reminds us that our objectives in being the Church in the Diocese are:

- **Celebrating and strengthening our unity**
- **Transforming our words and our lives to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is at hand.**
- **Remembering that the Church is not here to serve herself, but to serve God and the world.**
- **Evangelisation of those who have not embraced the Gospel, using effective means, appropriate to our own era, while always respecting those who we serve.**

When considering the mission of the Church, we must remember those who operate outside of the confines of our parish structures, but are in the same way, ministering to the world through the proclamation of the Gospel.

This work is not the sole responsibility of the clergy. It affects all of our communities and all within those communities. It is easy to forget those working outside of normal parish structures:

- **Schools form an important part of the mission of the Church.** Our Diocese has over 90 schools, nursery, primary and secondary, all of which are integral to the life of the Church. The mission of the Catholic school is to seek the ongoing development of every pupil and young person and to promote their well-being and freedom celebrating their uniqueness in many and varied ways. This vision shapes the daily life of the Catholic school as a community in which faith is expressed and shared through every aspect of its activity. Through the pattern of daily prayer, through the celebration of the sacraments of the Church, through works of charity, through a striving for justice in all it does, a Catholic school seeks to be a community in which the content of the life of faith is shared.
- **Chaplaincies form part of the outreach of the Church** and through the work of chaplains, helpers and volunteers the well-being and faith of those who come into contact with the chaplaincy is fostered and developed. Each chaplaincy, be it hospital, school, workplace, prison or university should be a safe place where the Church engages in the inherent spirituality of human endeavour and the quality it brings to people's lives. Chaplaincy imitates the path of the Lord when he walked along the liminal routes of Palestine, not entering the villages and towns, but discovering those on the outskirts, who were often neglected by society. The encounter with the Lord often brought rich fruit, something which is found in the chaplaincies of today.



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FROM COOPERATION TO IMPLEMENTATION

Of grave importance to this consultation must be that the restructuring of parish communities should be **Mission Driven** not **Survival Driven**. A mission driven process is grounded in prayerful discernment, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It embraces resistance, anxiety and potential barriers by recognising the giftedness and difference in each other. No parish, cluster, merger, closing or opening is identical. Every parish community has its own individual personality that reflects the history, ethnicity, mission, values, and liturgical style of the members who share a common faith tradition.

Restructuring identifies the best practices of each parish to develop something new by combining the ways of each. If people go down the survival route, all of this is lost and a battle stance is taken against the will of the process. Therefore it is important to identify stages in the process of co-operation:

- **Review Parish Activity:** The development of the characteristics of the community in terms of its sacramental sustainability is important, so that pastoral care of the people becomes the basis for decision making not the availability of a priest.
- **Provide Effective Leadership:** the effectiveness of the proposals requires a lead from the Bishop and his Vicars General in the process. This must then filter down to the parochial clergy (both priest and deacon) and any lay-led parishes. Support and training for those involved in planning and implementing change is essential.
- **Adequate Preparation:** the bulk of the information will come in through the consultation and this stage requires the setting of a timeline, establishing realisable marker points in developing the collaboration between parishes.
- **Inform the Faithful:** provide information to help parishioners and stakeholders understand the need for reorganisation: examples could be data about priests and their retirements, expected ordinations, parish life and activities, the role of lay leadership and mission and a whole theology of change. Drawing on the Pastoral Plan and the Assembly is a vital part of this.
- **Collaborate:** too often it is seen that the clergy make the decisions and the laity follow. For these proposals to have a fruitful and lasting effect, there must be an ownership of the process by all involved.

- **Stick to time:** once a timeline has been established, keep moving towards those published goals. It is easy to filibuster time away and arrive at a decision point without sufficient reflection. Move at a deliberate pace so that decisions are meaningful and real.
- **Prepare for difficulties:** these discussions are not going to be easy, especially amongst the people. Make sure that decisions are made with care and the news transmitted with compassion, especially where there is a decision to let go of something cherished by people. This may be the time of a Mass or the demolition of a church – each brings about hurt and distress.
- **Root everything in prayer:** speaks for itself!
- **Audit our resources:** how can we best utilise all that we have available so that we can be effective ministers of the Gospel now and in the future so that we can meet what is needed and aspired.



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IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the final proposals will be organic to each situation as they arise in the two previous stages. All implementation work is done in the name of the Bishop and as such needs his permission to be undertaken. As the Chief Shepherd of the Diocese, it is his responsibility to ensure that the pastoral care of each Eucharistic community is preserved.

On a local level, the deans will oversee the implementation of the decisions arising out of the consultation. One of the important things to keep in mind during the consultation is that the current structure of deaneries may need to change as well, as the process moves forward as there may be more geographically favourable collaborations which would cross deanery boundaries. It may be that we move to smaller, more functional deaneries, or in the other direction to larger deaneries encompassing greater areas with internal partitions of parishes grouped together to provide mutual support and pastoral action. New deanery structures will emerge through the process and again, these will be implemented in an organic way. Until such a decision is made, the consultation at the local level will be the responsibility of the deans.

Each time agreement is reached, a report should be sent to the Bishop outlining the agreement between communities. This is ratified by the Bishop's Council and the Bishop will issue a Decree to create the new situation canonically. It is then that the implementation takes effect.

Obviously, as the plans are executed around the diocese, there may be need to review deanery structures and this too will be part of the on-going organic work of the process. When a new deanery structure is created, again the Bishop will issue a Decree which will state the new parishes in the deanery and its dean.

Recommendations, therefore, at a local level, will be phased in over time, and at their own pace. Obviously, when need arises, support may be given to advance the process (due to extenuating circumstances) but this would be the exception rather than the rule. All of the commissions of the Diocese should be of service to this process and not oppose it: they are at the liminal places of mission and need to be supportive of this work which underpins their own. Creative collaboration between the diocesan commissions and the Eucharistic communities is to be encouraged and supported.

A PROPOSED TIMELINE

- Autumn 2011** Bishop meets with his clergy for a study day on the document and initial work is begun amongst the clergy
- November 2011** Clergy utilise their Deanery meetings to look at the issues specific to their deaneries (as currently structured)
- Early Spring 2012** Parishes begin the process of reflecting and developing the parish audit using local means; *remember to root the process in prayer*
- Pentecost 2012** Parishes report their findings to their communities, and the priests bring the findings to the Deanery meeting which reviews and makes proposals which are taken back to the parishes
- Early Summer 2012** Collation of final proposals for collaboration amongst parishes in the Deanery, and whether there should be changes to deanery structures
- Autumn 2012** Bishop leads clergy and people in adopting the new structures and proposals.
- Parishes begin to implement the new structures and collaborations.
- January 2013** First phase of new collaboration is formally implemented between parishes/communities in the diocese paving the way for a continual reflection on the structure of the church.



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APPENDIX

Guiding Principles

The following pages are presented to you in order to help and facilitate the establishment and enrichment of new collaborative communities from our existing structures. Parishes are the building-blocks of the Diocese: the Diocese is not an abstract, but is a community of communities. Our 108 parishes, each of which is its own community, are all joined together, from Hadfield to Holbeach, from Barton-upon-Humber to Lutterworth to form the Church of God in Nottingham.

Therefore we must **emphasise**:

- This process is a continuation of the work begun in the Diocesan Assembly.
- The restructuring of parish communities enables priests and people together to form a viable and vibrant parish community.
- Each parish community will be consulted and given the opportunity to express their joys and hopes, fears and sorrows about the future of their parish.
- The merging of parishes does not mean the closure of churches; it is for each parish community to decide whether a particular church is viable or not depending on their needs.
- Asking parishes to accept that their parish priest lives in another parish does not mean that they are somehow less important or worthy than that parish.
- The merging of parishes will not be imposed from above, but will be organic: consultation; cooperation; merger.

PARISHES

- Each parish is 'a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor' (c 515, §1).
- Parishes are, as a rule, territorial, which means that each parish must have defined boundaries (cf. c 518).
- Territorial parishes encompass all Latin-rite Catholics domiciled therein, together with those Catholics of Eastern Churches *sui iuris* who do not have their own parish (cf. c 107, 111-112). Whether parish priests agree with the need for such boundaries or not is irrelevant. A Catholic who, for whatever reason, attends Mass elsewhere is still a parishioner of his territorial parish and entitled to pastoral care.

- In addition to its finance committee (which is a requirement of universal law (cf. c 537)), each parish must have a pastoral council (which may be made a requirement by particular law (cf. c 536)), chaired by the parish priest, to help him in his ministry.
- Since the celebration of Sunday Mass is 'the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice' (CCC 2180), and the parish 'is the place where all the faithful can be gathered for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist' (CCC 2179), it should be a real celebration of the unity and diversity of the whole parish community. Consequently, there should not be an excessive number of celebrations of Sunday Mass in a parish such that the Mass cannot be celebrated with dignity and devotion.
- There can never be more celebrations of Mass timetabled on a Sunday or holyday of obligation in a given parish than one priest can lawfully celebrate, unless two or more priests are appointed thereunto. No priest is permitted to celebrate more than three Masses on any given Sunday or holyday of obligation, or two Masses on a weekday (cf. c 905, §2). This means that a priest may never celebrate more than five Sunday Masses (two vigil Masses and three on Sunday) – although this should only be *in casu necessitatis*.
- Celebrations of the Word and Communion may be held on weekdays without the permission of the Bishop, but may only be held on Sundays or holydays of obligation with the express permission of the Bishop in a parish where it is impossible for Mass to be celebrated at all.
- The faithful must be urged to pray for vocations to the priesthood, and all Celebrations of the Word and Communion must include a reminder to the faithful that Mass cannot be celebrated because the priest is absent together with a prayer for vocations.
- Decisions about Mass times should be made by the parish priest in consultation with his parishioners and neighbouring parish priests, but must be approved by the Bishop before they come into effect.



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PARISH CHURCHES

- A church is 'a sacred building intended for divine worship, to which the faithful have right of access for the exercise, especially the public exercise, of divine worship' (c 1214).
- Each parish ought to have a properly-designated parish church, in which the principal liturgical celebrations are held; this is established by decree of the Bishop.
- In addition, a parish may have a chapel-of-ease (a church) or a Mass centre (a non-Catholic church or other building, e.g., a school, in which Mass is celebrated on a regular basis).

PARISH PRIESTS

- The parish priest is the pastor of all Latin-rite Catholics in his parish regardless of where or when they attend Mass.
- Every parish must have a named parish priest, even if he is not resident therein, who is the proper pastor of the parish or parishes entrusted to him (cf. c 519). There is a variety of models:
 - One parish, one priest (cf. c 526, §1). This is the traditional model, in which one priest is the parish priest of one parish, maybe being assisted by a curate.
 - Multiple parishes, one priest (cf. c 526, §1). If there is a shortage of priests, one priest may be appointed as parish priest of two or more parishes.
 - Team ministry (cf. c 517, §1). Where circumstances require it, the pastoral care of one or more parishes can be entrusted to several priests, each of whom enjoys most of the rights and responsibilities of the parish priest (cf. c 543), acting under the guidance of a moderator, who is to direct the joint action of those priests and be responsible for it to the Bishop.

- Deacon- or lay-led parish community (cf. c 517, §2). If there is a shortage of priests, the Bishop can ask a deacon, layperson or community of people to 'share in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish', with a non-resident parish priest who directs the pastoral care therein.
 - Clerical religious institute or clerical society of apostolic life (cf. c 520, §1). The Bishop can, with the permission of the appropriate Superior, entrust a parish to a clerical religious institute or a clerical society of apostolic life, with either the 'one parish, one priest' or the 'team ministry' model. This has to be done in writing, and can be permanently or for a specified time, but not indefinitely (cf. c 520, §2).
- Without prejudice to canon 526, §1, a priest should not be the parish priest of more than two parishes.
 - The parish priest is the rector of the parish church and any other church belonging to the parish.
 - Certain liturgical functions are 'especially entrusted' to the parish priest (c 530).



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RENEWAL



CHAPLAINCIES

- A creative use of chaplaincies can enable the growth and development of Catholic communities which complement but in no way replace parishes. In chaplaincies, the pastoral care of specific communities of people who, 'because of their condition of life are not able to avail themselves of the ordinary care of parish priests' can be focused and developed (cf. c 568).
- A Catholic chaplain is 'a priest to whom is entrusted in a stable manner the pastoral care, at least in part, of some community or special group of Christ's faithful, to be exercised in accordance with universal or particular law' (c 564).
- Formally, only a priest may be a chaplain. Every hospital, university and prison ought to have a designated priest as its chaplain, even if someone else, e.g., a deacon, member of a religious institute or lay person, provides for day-to-day pastoral care, e.g., the administration of Holy Communion in a hospital or visiting.
- The jurisdiction of a chaplain is cumulative with that of the parish priests, and members of a chaplaincy remain parishioners of the territorial parish in which they are domiciled or quasi-domiciled. Consequently, 'a chaplain is to maintain the due relationship with the parish priest' (c 569).
- A chaplain enjoys *ex officio* the faculty to hear confessions, preach, administer Viaticum and the anointing of the sick, and to administer Confirmation to those in danger of death (cf. c 566, §2). They ought to be given the faculty to baptise, receive into the full communion of the Catholic Church confirm and celebrate marriages. N.B. Chaplains do not receive *ex officio* the right to witness marriages – this faculty has to be granted *ad casum* or *ad universitatem* by the local Ordinary or parish priest, and without the faculty such a marriage would be invalid due to defect of canonical form.
- Baptisms, reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church, confirmations, marriages and deaths ought to be registered in the parish registers of the parish concerned, as well as in a register held by the chaplain.

THE RESTRUCTURING OF PARISHES

- Parishes are erected, altered or suppressed by the Bishop, after consultation with the Council of Priests (c 515, §1). Territorial parishes cannot really be suppressed; rather, they can be dismembered or merged by decree to form new parishes.
- When considering the restructuring of parishes, circumstances such as the financial viability of parishes, civil boundaries at county, borough/district and, where they exist, civil parishes, the seating capacity and state of churches, geography and the ministry of religious institutes should be considered. Parish boundaries ought not to cross civil boundaries.
- The number of priests is a consideration, but a parish is a community and not a benefice, and therefore questions concerning the restructuring of parishes cannot be seen purely through the prism of the number of priests in active ministry.
- **The merging of parishes does not mean the closure of churches.** It is often the case that people see 'parish merger' as meaning the closure of their place of worship. These two processes are very different: whereas a parish may be merged for a variety of reasons, a church may only be closed 'when grave reasons suggest,' and the Bishop must 'be sure that the good of souls would not be harmed' by this (c 1222, §2). The jurisprudence of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura suggests that the relative shortage of clergy is not in itself a grave reason for closing a particular church.
- If two parishes have merged, and the parish churches of the two former parishes are retained, there is no reason why both churches cannot still be called 'parish church.'
- There is no need to create new structures or to duplicate resources when the historical structures of territorial parish, deanery and chaplaincy are still useful.



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*“ Coming to Him
as to a living
stone... chosen
by God and
precious, you
also, as living
stones, are being
built up a
spiritual house, a
holy priesthood,
to offer up
spiritual
sacrifices
acceptable to
God through
Jesus Christ. ”*



DIOCESE OF
NOTTINGHAM