

DIOCESAN DRAFT PLAN FOR RENEWAL & RESTRUCTURE:

At our parish meeting on September 10th 2017 we heard and talked about the Diocesan draft plan for Renewal and Restructure a document setting out in draft a vision and strategy to take our diocese see <http://www.dioceseofbrentwood.net/news/>

We submitted our parish response as follows:

Working Together to Evangelise Our Diocese

Response from the Parish of St John the Baptist, Ilford

The parish gathered on Sunday 10th September 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 of St John the Baptist is small, it is very definitely a cohesive, praying community practising diakonia both through caring and support within the parish; and externally; most powerfully through our particular overseas project. It is also a financially viable community, currently with a positive bank balance. There are necessary essential works to be undertaken which we believe on past experience we will be able to finance.

We have a strong team of parishioners and are able to organise ourselves and our parish to provide the necessary support for a resident priest with other responsibilities or particular needs.

Our circumstances argue strongly that our continued future as a parish is the key to our community being practically able to continue their practice.

Kerygma-martyria has a special resonance for our parish, particularly when we recall Matthew 3:1, "In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming...". We are in a high-density residential area whose demographic has changed over the years from a significant Irish Catholic population which used to fill our pews literally to overflowing, to a predominantly Muslim population. Our recent addition of a bright and bold new church noticeboard may seem like a small proclamation, but we have watched, gladly, as it has attracted positive attention; an important reminder for us to recognise the potential for evangelisation in our area.

Our praying community is drawn together by leitourgia and, as we write this response, we are grateful to be welcoming the parish's ninth parish priest in our fifty-year history, Fr Thomas. His official welcome was yesterday at an international lunch at which the parish came together to celebrate, through the sharing of food, Fr Thomas's Kerala heritage and the diverse ancestry of our parishioners. However, the celebration yesterday was as much because it had begun with the celebration of the Eucharist; and only Fr Thomas's presence made that possible.

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

- 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.

Our parish sits adjacent to Newbury Park which is served by a wonderful priest with his wife and children. The fact of the extraordinary makes a nonsense of the absolute requirements of the ordinary. **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.

Lumen Gentium was written at a time when the Church did not have a manpower crisis, certainly not in England, which at that time enjoyed such strong support from all those priests from Ireland to whom much more than a generation are indebted for their regular access to the sacraments. Our parish sees Pope Francis's intention of the joy in 'the new chapter' he speaks of in Evangelii Gaudium being sparked by a recognition that our Church, whilst holding firm to those principles which must not change, has a future that can better harness a broader manpower support than previously allowed. **Pope Francis will adhere to Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, but in so doing will be more pragmatic in what he offers, if we are vocal about our Diocesan needs.**

- 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.

This conclusion immediately raised the question: whether St John the Baptist?

Our parish has the practical difficulty that the church is not on any bus route, nor does the route along The Drive directly link us to any other Catholic Church. This has led to organised transport support for those for whom it is necessary but, for those who make their own way on foot, a future without our church would become a major obstacle to practice.

Our parish has a major practical advantage. In the early days of our parish, Bishop Casey was a regular visitor to offer Mass on a Sunday, commenting often, that if it were not for the incumbent, he would be looking to the parish as his retirement home! **Our history is that the parish has provided tremendous support for parish priests 'with other responsibilities'.**

Whether it is innate, or borne of that experience, **it seems widely accepted amongst the clergy that the parish largely runs itself and is therefore an excellent home for a priest either with other responsibilities or at an age where leitourgia remains a driving force, but the burdens of a less supportive parish would be unreasonable.**

We fall into that category of being a parish that would like to remain largely unchanged. We believe there are reasons why we are special, both in need and in what we can offer to a priest.

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.

16th October 2017

And received a reply from Steve Webb~ Director of development Diocese of Brentwood:

Mon 23/10, 14:05 ML All Stewards of Gospel (AllStewardsofGospel@dioceseofbrentwood.org)

Dear Steward of the Gospel,

Many thanks to all of you who have sent in responses to the Draft Working Plan. The deadline has now passed and we have had a good response. I'd be grateful if you could pass on our thanks to everyone in your parish who has contributed in any way.

At the meeting on 30th September I said that we would make a consolidated response to the feedback on the document and the questions asked on 30th and I will do that in early/ mid November before we publish the next document for consideration.

We are now working on the next stage of the process with a view to getting the document to you at the end of November between Christ the King and First Sunday of Advent.

We are ordering many more of the next document and distributing them will be much easier if we can get a few volunteers for that week. If anyone can help that would be most appreciated.

May I take this opportunity to remind you that we hope that parishioners will read, think and pray about the document and then meet in parishes in January to discuss it. It will also be useful for Stewards to give consideration to meeting with their neighbours after they've read the document and before we all come together again on the 24th February 2018.

Thank you for all that you are doing to help with this initiative. It is much appreciated.

Kind regards
Steve



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