

COUNCIL OF THE LAITY

28 March 2015

Questions and Responses

(There were 9 groups, 2 of the questions were very similar)

1 Will Forward Together in Hope continue when Bishop Seamus retires?

At some point before his 75th birthday (which just happens to be on 7 July 2017) Bishop Seamus will offer his resignation to Pope Francis. Recent experience indicates that his successor is not likely to be appointed for some time after that. The world does not end on that day, nor does all development. It is interesting to note that anyone at all is free to write to the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Mennini at 54 Parkside, London, SW19 5NE, offering their thoughts about what is needed in the future bishop of any diocese. Many of Bishop Seamus' bishop-colleagues are aware of something of what is happening in our Diocese, and they will be important people when it comes to looking for any bishop in any diocese in the future.

Perhaps the best thing all of us can do is work very hard over the next two years to ensure that Bishop Seamus has some clear indication as to the direction of the diocese for the foreseeable future. It may be that our prayers and questions and deliberations are just the beginning of a continuing period of renewal. Whatever happens, the Holy Spirit will be with us, inspiring us all to live the Gospel no matter who any future bishop might be.

2 How can we ensure that the Response to the Questionnaire is reflective of the whole community and not just the usual voices?

I suspect there will be as many ways of responding to the Questionnaire as there are communities in the Diocese. I guess once it is known that the Questionnaire is available, after 24th May, then parishioners can begin asking how it will be filled in and what opportunities there are for people to do so. The Questionnaire will also be available on line via our website www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk

It is also our intention to provide a questionnaire which will be more suitable for individuals to complete – either regular parishioners or, especially, those parishioners who are currently 'on sabbatical' from worship, and who may want to say how they feel about their Church and what they would like from it.

As far as possible, I imagine each different 'worshipping community' completing the Questionnaire. Every community has its own story and that story deserves to be heard. However, it may be more convenient and fit the current stage of development of worshipping communities in the same parish, to be looked at together. Ideally that decision is made by the communities themselves.

3 How can the *Forward Together in Hope* team monitor if the Questionnaire is being handled correctly in parishes

Quite honestly, we can't! We have endeavoured to have a lay contact in each parish to ensure that all information is available to as wide a group as possible. We make available as much as we can (including these questions and responses) on line. From the end of May we will be visiting deaneries to meet with priests and representatives from deaneries and parishes to explore how they are managing to cope with the Questionnaire, and we are available via email and phone to help in any way we can. But at the end of the day, we have to trust that parishioners and priests will look very carefully at what is available.

As I noted earlier, there will also be an opportunity for people to look at an individual questionnaire, covering much the same ground, but without the need for detailed factual information to be returned.

Ultimately, it does come down to trust and a willingness to work with each other for the good of the community and the diocese as a whole.

4 How can we tackle the fear of closure and change?

The emphasis of *Forward Together in Hope* is not on closure, but it is on change. The underlying presumption is that we can all become closer friends of Jesus and more dedicated followers of the Lord. This happens when we belong to a viable and flourishing community. The change being explored is really within ourselves. As Cardinal Hume used to say: 'When I hear the words; 'Things have to change around here', I know it means that I have to change.

Change takes a long time and it is frightening. It can leave us feeling vulnerable and fragile. At the same time we can become more humble and confident in our faith. Bishop Seamus mentioned at the meeting on 18 March that many people move from belonging to an 'Institutional Church' when we are younger, through a 'Critical' relationship with the Church until we move into a more 'Mystical' way of being and living, more gracious and more compassionate. All of this takes time and it can be a bit scary.

It is interesting to think about the word 'closure' in relation to our worshipping communities. What we mean is that a particular building ceases to be used for worship. The vitally important question is really around how the people who worship are supported, encouraged and enabled to continue to pray, worship and feel part of a viable community. The simple fact that there might well be around 50 non-retired priests serving our diocese in 15 years' time clearly implies that some reorganisation is essential – the important thing is how are the people supported through change and development.

5 What help will the Worshipping Community get from the Diocese to take it from theory to practice?

It will depend to some extent on what areas of need are identified by worshipping communities. At the present moment there are 14 Departments in our Diocesan Curia, ranging from the Department of Adult Formation and Evangelisation to the Department for Youth Ministry, including very big departments such as Education to smaller departments such as Spirituality and Ecumenism. All the departments are listed from page 40 of the Northern Catholic Calendar – with names and contact addresses and numbers, or on page 14 of the Facts and Figures Supplement in the Forward Together in Hope Pack made available to every priest and parish contact on 18 March.

Regarding the process itself, from the end of May onwards, Tony Sacco and myself will attempt to visit as many deaneries as possible to explore with priests and lay people how best to work through the Questionnaire once it is available at Pentecost.

We are also looking at the possibility of some training for some people in the Diocese to help with Change management in the early part of 2016.

6 How do we keep the momentum going throughout the process?

Good question! We do need to keep our minds and hearts open to what can be different, and allow the Holy Spirit to help us keep focussed on becoming more dedicated disciples. We all need to keep one another in the community aware of what we can do between now and Pentecost – your parish priest and parish contact have information about this.

The ***Forward Together in Hope*** website (www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk) will contain everything we can make available on line.

Some parish contacts are keen to be in touch with their neighbours so that they can support each other through the preparation stage, and then during the time when communities will be exploring the Questionnaire.

If you have any further ideas, perhaps you can let us know! (Sorry, I know that sounds a little bit like Herod 'You go and find out and come back and tell me...')

7 How do we capture the voice of the whole community?

How do we ensure that information is passed on to all parishioners?

I suspect this is the first time anyone has tried to do this, so we're seeking advice from everyone! The ***Forward Together in Hope*** team are currently exploring what electronic means there are to contact as wide a range of people as possible. This, of course, presumes that people know we are here and that we want to hear from them!

Any ideas about how we contact 'the hard to reach' will be gratefully received – politicians are endeavouring to do this even as we speak.

The email accompanying these notes to every parish contact will encourage them to be in touch with their parish priest and support him with any initiatives that can be taken in the local community.

Some parishes are ensuring that the DVD is being shown at every Mass over the weekend.

There will be a briefer Questionnaire made available to accompany the larger community based exercise – again this will be on line. But it will be perfectly possible to copy it and give it to others via whatever means possible. Some communities intend to be in touch with everyone involved in bringing children to school. Some priests will be offering it to everyone seeking to have a child baptised. We intend to be in touch with all groups preparing for Confirmation later in the year.

Some parishes are intending to make copies of the briefer questionnaire available in Post Offices and Newsagents...

Quite honestly, if you do have any ideas, please let us know.

8 How is *Forward Together in Hope* working in conjunction with the Education Department to involve young people?

There are really two questions here; one about the Education Department and the other about young people.

The staff of the Education Department are very supportive and have been extremely helpful in enabling us to be in touch with the Head teachers of all of our 159 schools. All the Head

Teachers have received copies of the DVD and CD with all our documentation on it, along with suggestions about using the DVD at Staff meetings, Governors' meetings and in sections of the RE Curriculum. It may well be that we will be working with the Department at some stage in the future regarding the pupils in schools.

As for involvement with young people, we have met with some parish youth groups, spent time with the Diocesan Youth Council and intend to follow up that gathering with further contact via the Youth Ministry Team. We will be meeting with the network of school chaplains and will explore with them how young people can make a contribution to future parts of the programme.

Some communities are wondering if ***Forward Together in Hope*** can be seen in conjunction with the John Paul II Award.

On top of this there is a specific heading in the Pack and Questionnaire about young people and their involvement in the local community. It is hoped that every one of our worshipping communities will explore with young people not just that heading, but the whole process, so that their views and ideas are present in the local community.

Jim O'Keefe 9 April 2015