

Forward Together in Hope

Forward Together in Hope is our Diocesan journey of renewal. It is about all of us, young or old; lay or ordained; in parishes, schools or housebound working together to explore and discern God's will for our Diocese. It is an invitation to every one of us to become closer friends and disciples of Jesus. It will not be an easy journey; in the words of Bishop Séamus, 'This could be painful, but there can be no growth without pain'.

At the end of the process it is likely that there will be significant change for many of us. Some communities may not be able to worship in their current church but will be able to thrive by joining with a neighbouring community. Other communities may discover a real sense of responsibility in relation to neighbouring communities. A key strength of the approach is that it is taking place in the same way across the whole of the Diocese. The entire process is firmly rooted in prayer and a real openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The success of *Forward Together in Hope* depends on all of us playing our part and thinking beyond the limits of our experience and imagination.

Preparing the Way

The first stage of the journey, *Preparing the Way*, involved raising awareness of the current position in our Diocese, including the reduction in the number of priests and mass-goers and the fall in income. Many of you will have seen this in the introductory DVD made available to lay representatives and priests in each parish with other resources. All of this information is available to everyone on the *Forward Together in Hope* website.

Exploring the Way

The next stage of the journey, *Exploring the Way* is about involving and consulting with as many people as possible regarding the present and future of your worshipping community. It is also about identifying and celebrating what your

community does well and helping it to focus upon the things that will ensure that it can flourish into the future. When our communities flourish discipleship is nurtured.

Parish Questionnaire and Data Pack

A detailed questionnaire is now available and needs to be consulted on and completed by each community by the start of Advent (29th November 2015).

The questionnaire has 3 parts:

Part A – *A Picture of Our Community* - provides the opportunity to gather, explore and present facts and figures about a wide range of facets of parish life.

Part B – *Reflective Questions* – for open discussion by your community and the opportunity to highlight other issues and good practice (See overleaf).

Part C – *Our Community's initial thoughts and ideas about the future* – where your community is asked to provide its first thoughts about how it might move forward.

Accompanying the questionnaire is a Data Pack containing information unique to your parish.

Getting Involved

It is likely that your parish will be arranging a series of open meetings to discuss the questions in the questionnaire. Please make every effort to attend and play a full part in these meetings. If you are not able to get there, please consider the questions overleaf and make your views known, verbally or in writing to the chair of the meeting.

The full questionnaire and a range of other documents are available to download from www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk. The Forward Together in Hope Team can be contacted on hope@rcdhn.org.uk or (0191) 243 3304.

Please continue to pray for the success of *Forward Together in Hope*.





The Reflective Questions

1 The Christian Faithful

- How can your community look to sustain and increase the number of people worshipping with you towards 2030?

2 Leadership

- What lay leadership is currently viable and effective in your community?
- For what other areas of your community life could trained lay men and women assume responsibility?

3 Active Involvement of People

- How diverse and active are parishioners within the community?
- How can the parish community invite and prepare more people to support it?

4 Worship and Spiritual Life

- Are there aspects of your community's regular worship together at Mass that are working particularly well and deepen the spiritual life of those present?
- Is there anything your community can do to encourage a deeper prayer life and engagement with Scripture?

5 Education and Continuing Formation

- What good experiences has your community had in the past and what opportunities would you like to see for 'continuing formation' in the faith for members of your community?
- How can closer relationships be developed between the worshipping community, the school(s) the young people attend, and the families that belong to both?

6 Outreach

- What good experiences has your community had regarding our call to be involved with other Christians, other faiths, all men and women of good will?
- How can your worshipping community become more immersed in the local community?

7 Finances

- How do you feel about the average weekly offertory donation in your community? Does this need to increase to enable your community to flourish in 2030?
- If you are a finance-rich community, how do you feel about sharing some of your resources with very poor parts of the Diocese?

8 Facilities

- What sort of use can your community foresee for any unused or underused parish facilities in the future?
- How can the community develop the capacity to look after its facilities in the future?

9 Geographic Distance

- How does your community feel about the possibility that the only way to ensure flourishing in the future is to become part of a new parish community?
- Are there ways in which your community can serve and support neighbouring communities?

10 Young People

- What good experiences regarding Church life do the young people have in your community?
- How can the presence and witness of young people be more encouraged and supported in the community?

11 What else?

- What would you see as the priorities to ensure a viable and flourishing community in 2030?
- Do you have any other observations – particularly about anything we may have missed?

12 Good Practice

- Is there something your community is involved in which will be of interest to others in the Diocese?