

Council of Laity Meeting – Saturday 21st November 2015

1) Roots and Fruits

Participants were asked to consider two questions and log their thoughts on 'post-it' notes.

a) In what ways has *Forward Together in Hope* taken root in your parish community?

- Taken root by – whole Mass involvement, open meetings. The process.
- Conversation / meetings are necessary or we will close.
- Engagement - Young - Old.
- Parishes to work together more - and Deanery.
- Genuine self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.
- Roots firmly planted, brought community together.
- More together in meetings.
- Prayer at Mass has brought attention to the whole issue. Leading to meetings, notices on Parish Mass sheet.
- Ideas, involvement.
- Church-goers – Parents – 'Resting' Catholics.
- It's patchy in many parishes but for ours I have spoken to people in the parish that I didn't know. There is a desire to go ahead.
- We have used homily for parish discussion of each theme – and parishioners have become increasingly engaged - 'I enjoy sharing Church'.
- Information in church. Several meetings. Services with Fr Jim O'Keefe.
- Prayerful discussion in small groups.
- Brought more people together on parish issues.
- People can have their say on what's going on in the Parish.
- Unable to grow without positive nourishment from Parish Priest. A missed opportunity.
- A lot of ideas have already produced an action plan which PPC will take forward.
- The seed has been planted (one meeting) but I'm not sure if it has taken root. The *Forward Together in Hope* prayer is said at all weekday Masses. I await the blossom, perhaps the root/seed need more feed?
- It has people talking and thinking about matters.
- A new awareness of the need for change guided by God and ourselves.
- Provided greater focus to Parish Council plans.
- Widespread deep thinking about the parish.
- Embraced by Parish. Ownership by subgroups for particular sections for exploration and completion.
- *Forward Together in Hope* prayer at every Mass; printed on bulletin; cards available etc.
- Prayer at every Mass got people talking - not just at arranged meetings. Questionnaire at back of church, emailed to parishioners - also printed on newsletters

b) What are the fruits of *Forward Together in Hope* in your parish so far?

- Increase in numbers attending discussions
- Some people seem to be fearful - manifesting itself in being very positive (bigging up) about Parish to avoid closure.
- Raised awareness of what 'active groups' going on in Parish.
- Some good fruits such as young people coming to meetings.
- It is not evident. We now have a parish prayer.
- Positive action being taken by Parish Council in sub-dividing to consider 'age-specific' issues and activities – spiritual and social.
- You find out who is committed – who wants this.
- Awareness of the Church especially with declining numbers.
- A realisation that obedience to the laws of the Church is essential. Sadly a lack of participation by the youth.
- We are in the process of using the process as an opportunity for future development.
- Need for whole church to be open to change (including hierarchy).
- Hearing everyone's voice has led some parishioners to say they had not realised others felt the way they did about *our* parish.
- New people involving themselves. Agenda things to table for the new year.
- Getting to know people in the parish.
- Involving our young people.
- Change of venue for Mass followed by discussion and refreshments.
- More joint events between parish and chaplaincy have already started.
- Young People got together.
- I await the blossom, perhaps the root/seed needs more feed?
- Bitter fruit – we are a divided parish.
- Collated information from *Forward Together in Hope*. Identified issues which can be addressed later.
- Coming together of different elements of the Parish.
- Openness to change and willingness to change.
- Permission has been given to express fears and aspirations to praise strengths and voice weaknesses and plot a course for future.
- Remind parish we're part of a Diocesan 'family'; got people talking.
- Rosary/ prayer group started as a result of discussion.
- People are talking more.
- Had some good discussions, ideas.
- Prayerful discussion in small group taken into extended group. Small group of people are always there – extended group who normally do not get involved.

2) As we travel further on our journey...

The Council was asked to offer its advice and wisdom about the next stages of the *Forward Together in Hope* journey and spent time in groups considering two key questions. Feedback from each group is presented below:

a) What might we do so that people are fully informed and involved?

Group 1

- Need to stay/keep parishioners fully informed – through bulletin inserts, websites and spoken word.
- Size of groups needs to be carefully controlled and facilitated by an independent person so that it is not personal or considered a 'foregone conclusion'. Use of a trained facilitator? (Training course for facilitators?).
- If priest numbers decline we need to expand our ideas and extend use of other liturgical services e.g. Word and Communion. May need to update Canon Law.

Group 2

- Using reflective time during homily to share.
- Feedback to Parish.
- Leaving hardcopy in church for people to see.
- Youth Village – reflective session/complete questionnaire.

Group 3

- Several working groups.
- Focus groups for youth.
- Meetings open to all Parishioners.
- Themed homilies.
- Video (played in homily).
- Worked on strengths.
- Electronic and hard copies sent out to Parishioners.
- Consultation and feedback.

Group 4

- Keep momentum going. There is no deadline now, so there is less pressure. Start implementing parishioners' ideas contained in Sections B and C; there is no need to wait until Easter to do things. Keep the pot simmering - do not let it go cold.
- Keep everyone on board with feedback and updates to the parish to continue, in relation to diocese and parish plans/action.

Group 5 and 8

Informed

- Simplify the questions
- Engage during Mass - 'lock in'
- Push the schools involvement to inform – especially non-attending Catholics

- Use **all** types of media to engage – web, e-mail, written, video, leaflets, cards, word of mouth (especially playground parents!) – keep momentum up!

Involved

- People choose to get involved in spite of amount of information – some won't engage.
- Role of 'Parish Champions(s)' one-to-one relationships – BUT need commitment!
- 'Nudge tactics' – e.g. (healthy) competition.

Group 6

- Keep telling people over and over again in different ways.
- Give regular updates – Website, Facebook, Parish Bulletin, School newsletter.
- Use images.
- Social events.
- Lay person to give update at the end of Mass.

Group 7

- Build on momentum.
- Gap until Easter? Look at suggestions and ask where do we start?
- Frustrations where no communications so far.
- Buddy system – neighbouring parishes.

b) How can all voices be heard to help us to reach a shared vision for our future together as a Diocese?

Group 1

- All types of discussion needed but ultimately must recognise Bishop's decision after deliberation of consultation.
- As wide a form of communication as possible, to involve all ages and opinions.

Group 2

Not all want to be heard – therefore have to accept the consensus decision.

Group 3

- Use all forms of communication.
- Deanery meetings - open to all parishioners.
- Shared good practice.

Group 4

- We need to wait until Easter in order to get more of a preliminary vision of where the FTH process is taking the diocese.
- Deanery level meetings of laity and priests together would be a good vehicle for thinking and sharing ideas about the diocese, more than parish level meetings, which tend to be parochial in nature.
- Maintain the Parish/Diocese Link Person in each parish, as used so far in the FTH process, to keep open another channel of communication between the parish and the deanery, the diocese and the FTH Team.

Group 5/8

- Reaching out is important – to ‘resting’ Catholics but also to non-Catholic ‘partners’.
- FTiH ‘Buddy’ – word of mouth to anyone not included (evangelise!).
- Use baptisms, funerals, weddings (where appropriate) to share the message.
- Voices will come with relationships – champions, buddies, schools, occasions.

Group 6

- Encourage people to be involved.
- Listen to everyone and invite people.

Group 7

- Clear problems in communications in some parts of the Diocese.
- Focus on different sections of community
 - If you leave people to come forward they will not
 - People think voicing opinion leads to commitment they may not want
- Groups move at different speeds.
- Personal/talking better than hard copy/electronic.

3) Individual feedback sheets (19 received)

Participants were asked the following questions:

Drawing upon your personal knowledge and using a scale of 1-5 where 1 is ‘Not at all’ and 5 is ‘Very’:

a) How *aware* (on average) are people in your parish about *Forward Together in Hope*?

Responses were in the range 2 to 5 with the average being 4.2

b) How *involved* (on average) have people in your parish been in *Forward Together in Hope*?

Responses here were again in the range 2 to 5 with the average this time being 3.7

c) What further advice can you offer for the next stages of *Forward Together in Hope*?

- Maintain the excellent help and support from the FTH team, available to parishes currently, going into the next phase and beyond. It made a big difference to have a ready source of help and support.
- Keep the momentum going, parish updates, deanery meetings, parish council, cluster group meetings/activities – good practice, move forward.
- Be prepared for much bitterness and anger (about suggested closures/amalgamation).
- Keep the message coming in as many forms as you can. Make everyone aware of progress too – particularly the %/no of responses.
- Keep it simple.
- Important to link with neighbouring parishes. Parish to continue to look at/implement action plans, not wait for Diocesan response.
- Need to emphasise that information need to be disseminated to all parishioners
- Updates to parishes.

- Awaiting the outcome of the questionnaire – but obviously youth must be encouraged to take part in the process.
- Make sure that don't take too long to feed back questionnaire results – danger of a vacuum if too long and lose momentum. Need to ensure coherent messages come back from online questionnaire, youth survey and parish questionnaires.
- Deanery meetings for all Parishioners.
- Go forward with what has already been suggested in groups on what were thought to be good ideas.
- Remember: it is about people, not systems or organisations. Timetables while useful are man-made.
- Use all forms of communication in straightforward language. Keep to timetable.
- Encourage buddying with other parishes.
- Clear communication with parishes so that decision-making is transparent and fair.
- Keep doing what we are already doing. Encourage people to join in 'nudging' them by sharing how much is going on. Look at other faiths/churches to find out how they are communicating with believers in preparing for the future.
- Online and offline communications – use church, use online(to capture non-attendees), use schools (to capture non-attendees).

d) Any other comments, questions or ideas?

- Keep having contact with young people for their ideas. Concerns about the future if priest/bishop moves on.
- At some point there needs to be an element of democracy so that deaneries can vote on their preferences. This will inform the final decision of the Bishop.
- I hope this invitation to participate within the future of the Diocese continues. We must be allowed to continue to contribute.
- A thing which seems to be absent in our discussions is the question of obedience and all that this means and that this is not an open forum for anarchy and riding off in different directions.
- Please keep updating on website so that we don't have to rely on 1 or 2 people for feedback.
- Support evangelisation outside the usual parameters - e.g. Can Catholic schools share talents, facilities and enthusiasm?
- Please don't forget those who are working more slowly.
- Regular communication. Clear and concise communication. Using various media to negate negative comments.
- I feel there is a passionate group of people behind *Forward Together in Hope* and this is spreading to our parish. Keep up the good work.

