

Forward Together in Hope Update: February/March 2016

A Call to Prayer and Discipleship



Lent is almost as early as it possibly can be, so as soon as the New Year Resolutions begin to wear off it is time to think of what will help us focus on the story of Jesus during Lent. This time of preparation before Easter could be a time when we pray for the courage we will need to face the future with hope. Imagine Jesus in the desert, the wilderness, the place of bewilderment, wondering about his future life and calling. This is an ideal time for us all to ponder what it means to be a follower of Jesus in this time and place. It might be an idea to pick one of the Gospels and actually read it during Lent. You'd be amazed; you could read Mark's Gospel in an hour! Just notice who Jesus chose as his close friends and followers, what they witnessed while they were with him and wonder what it means for us today.

You might like to join Bishop Séamus as he calls the diocese to prayer. During February and March there are seven opportunities across the diocese to pray for *Forward Together in Hope* and to wonder how we can become communities of disciples witnessing to Jesus at the present time. Each of the gatherings will follow the same format, namely: Reflection led by Bishop Séamus, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Concelebrated Mass. The dates and times are:

Tuesday 23 February - St Mary's Cathedral, Newcastle - 10.30am and 7.00pm

Thursday 25 February - St Mary's, Sunderland - 10.30 and 7.00pm

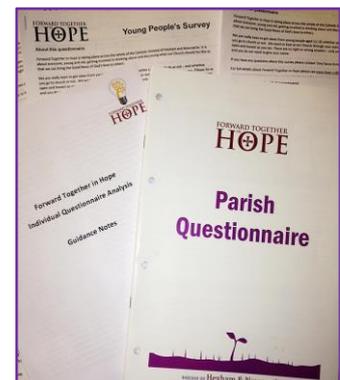
Tuesday 1 March - St Paul's, Alnwick - 10.30am

Wednesday 2 March - St Aloysius, Hebburn - 10.30am

Thursday 10 March - St Joseph's Hartlepool - 10.30am

Questionnaires Everywhere!

A key part of *Forward Together in Hope* is discovering and learning from the wide range of views and aspirations of people in our Diocese – whether they attend church regularly or not. As well as the very detailed information within 150 Parish Questionnaires, we have received 1,720 Individual Questionnaire and around 5,000 replies to the Young People's Survey. Also, replies are still being received from specific questions asked of Priests and Deacons. The *Forward Together in Hope* team is now engaged in the task of reviewing and analysing all of this rich information with a view to providing summaries to parishes in June.



With excellent support from Professor Karen Kilby and Dr Mathew Guest from the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University – and 15 dedicated volunteers we have started the analysis of Individual Questionnaires. So what are people saying in their replies? A random selection of comments from both the Individual Questionnaire and Young People’s Survey is included here to give a flavour of the breadth and depth of responses:

How do you hope the Catholic Church in the North East will look in 15 years’ time?

- I hope that it will be a thriving, visible and loving presence in the North East. I hope that it will be known as a "community of love" in which all can be welcomed and given a platform to know and love God and, filled with the Spirit of love, be compelled to reach out to others, especially the most vulnerable.

What do you think are the main challenges facing the Catholic Church in the North East as it looks to the future?

- Beige vestments, beige music, beige homilies. Mass is more like a very tedious school assembly than anything truly inspirational.

How could your parish make you feel more included as part of the community?

- Stop criticism when we make mistakes, despite all of our hard work.
- Come into school more and talk to us.
- Biscuits.

What do you think is good about the Catholic Church?

- A real sense of community.
- With respect, I don't think there is anything good about the Catholic Church which is why I do not attend.

What would you like to see more of in the Catholic Church?

- Less judging and misery - more happiness and spreading joy.
- Non-celibate priests, women priests, real bread, modern hymns/songs, young people.
- Jesus.

If you were Pope what changes would you make to the Catholic Church?

- I can't be Pope I am female.



What Happens Next?

The next few months will see a lot of intensive analysis and review of all of the information presented by parishes and individuals. We anticipate that feedback from this will be with you in June and will include:

- Observations on your Parish Questionnaire.
- Comparative information from across the Diocese.
- An overall ‘guidance’ document and a template for a Partnership Plan.
- A summary of Good Practice identified in questionnaires.
- Summaries of the Young People’s Survey and the Individual Questionnaire.

Between June and 27 November, the First Sunday of Advent, every community will be invited to look at what has been provided. The observations aim to help you to look again at how you have responded to the invitation to be involved in our Diocesan Journey of Renewal. The fundamental purpose of *Forward Together in Hope* is to explore how we can all be part of viable and flourishing communities in the future.

Our communities help us to become closer friends of Jesus and more courageous witnesses to him in our world. At the same time we all need to look ahead as the number of priests gradually declines. There will be fewer communities with resident priests, so it will be important to explore developments in conjunction with neighbours. Your clergy will help to arrange these meetings and members of the *Forward Together in Hope* team will join you to look to the future and explore what partnerships could develop to help ensure viable and flourishing worshipping communities in the months and years ahead.

Sharing Together in Hope



Left to Right – Bishop Séamus, Msgr Jack McEvilly, Fr Martin Stempczyk

We have had a number of opportunities to share ideas with notable visitors over recent weeks. Monsignor Jack McEvilly, Vicar General of the Diocese of Belleville in Illinois, joined us for a few days at the end of last year. Over two years ago, when we looked at renewal programmes in other dioceses in this country and abroad, we were impressed by the approach taken by the Diocese of Belleville. In fact we were so impressed that we ‘pinched’ their fundamental idea of a detailed Parish

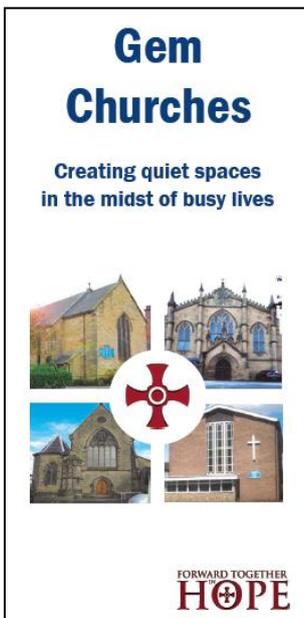
Questionnaire. Monsignor Jack met with us when he was in the country visiting relatives. He was very taken by his discussions with Bishop Séamus and the *Forward Together in Hope* Development Group. He felt that we are placing a stronger emphasis on young people than they did and are using online approaches to great effect. We talked together about creating ‘area leadership teams’ and the need for communities to work together much more closely in partnership with each other.

From closer to home, the recently appointed Bishop of Salford, Rt Rev John Arnold, took advantage of a week’s supply in Seahouses to visit us and pick our brains about our approach to the future. He was impressed by our commitment to awareness-raising among all Catholics in the Diocese, those practicing and those ‘resting’. He was also taken by our attempts to discover what those who are resting and those who aren’t Catholics actually think about the Catholic Church.

Finally, a few weeks ago, the Spirituality Department received an email from Bunbury Diocese in Western Australia. Due to a series of bush fires and big demands on the diocesan team offering pastoral support, they had not had time to prepare their Lent resources. They found ours online—and are going to use them around the parishes during Lent. The Church is a very wide-spread but close family – sharing ideas and resources across the world!

Rooted in Prayer

The *Forward Together in Hope* team and others are now busy reviewing and analysing the thousands of questionnaire responses we have received. The parishes, groups and individuals who have worked so hard to present the information may see the next few weeks as an opportunity for a well-earned break. But when you've caught your breath, you might just be wondering how to keep up the momentum before feedback arrives in June. If so, you could do worse than to go back to the prayer and liturgy resources that came out with 'Preparing the Way' and 'Exploring the Way'. There were far too many ideas to put in place at the time – and not all would have suited you. But, if we were saying prayer was important at those stages, it is even more so as we look ahead. We have heard great reports about 'Anchors' being commissioned in various parishes. Their ministry of prayer at home can really help to support the deliberations about 'what next' and sustain communities as they face the challenges and opportunities that are going to be laid before them.



You could revisit the idea of keeping your church open for parts of the day – or support a neighbouring church if their location works better. There will be a lot of encouragement to meet up and discuss the results of your parish review with other communities. This might be the time to think about how you might do this. Knowing human nature and our love of our own territory, could you book to go away somewhere – perhaps a day on Holy Island, Minsteracres or Emmaus Youth Village. You might think about inviting someone to help you to facilitate the conversations – maybe one of the reps you have met along the way who has the relevant skills. Or might you think about organising 24 Hours of Prayer in your deanery? Take another look at the resources – and see what you might be inspired to try over the coming months. They are available at www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk under 'Resources' or from the Spirituality Team – e-mail: spirituality@diocesehn.org.uk

Finding out more

For the latest information about *Forward Together in Hope* and for access to the range of resources, please visit www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk. To contact one of the *Forward Together in Hope* team, (Jim O'Keefe, Tony Sacco and Nancy Gash) e-mail: hope@diocesehn.org.uk or phone 0191 243 3304.

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