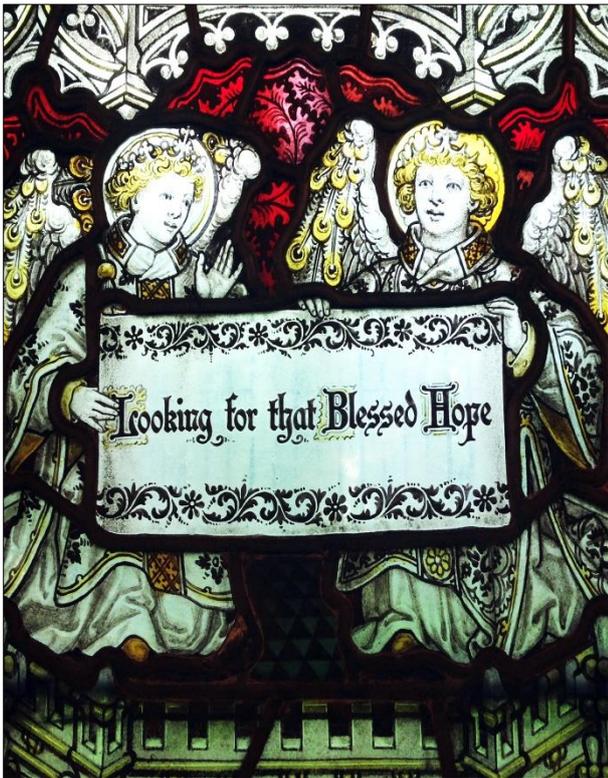


## Update – July/August 2016

### Keeping Steady in a Time of Change



What a lot has happened since our last Update. The majority of those who voted want the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, David Cameron was replaced by Theresa May and half the shadow cabinet resigned. Nigel Farage resigned (again) as leader of UKIP. Len Goodman left *Strictly Come Dancing*. The English Rugby Union team whitewashed the mighty Aussies. Andy Murray won Wimbledon, Sam Allardyce left Sunderland for England and the *Forward Together in Hope* Team produced a good deal of resource for every parish in the diocese. So much change in such a short period of time.

You will read later of all the materials that have been provided for each parish to help us deepen our understanding of what is happening in the Church in our diocese at present. It is there to

help us imagine new ways of organising ourselves so that those who want to be disciples of Jesus in the Catholic Church can be part of a viable and flourishing community in the future.

It actually all comes down to each one of us. Cardinal Basil Hume used to say: 'When I hear the phrase, "Things have to change around here", I get worried, because what it means is, *I* have to change'. We are sometimes tempted to think that it is up to 'other people' to welcome newcomers to our church; it is up to 'other people' to visit the housebound; for 'other people' to help with the newsletter and so on. The thing is, it isn't!

Every parishioner in the diocese will be affected by the outcome of the discussions taking place over the next 5 months. Every parish will be exploring how they can work more closely with their neighbours, how resources can be shared, what kind of leadership needs to be developed and shared if our communities are to be viable and flourish into the future.

Then again, it's not all about 'doing more things', it's really about 'becoming different'. It's not about very busy people trying to fit more things into a day, it's about us becoming used to thinking, behaving and choosing in the way Jesus thought, behaved and chose.

We are certainly facing new challenges, and the one who will keep us steady is the person of Jesus. He was used to constant questioning, disbelief and argument – and that was just among his disciples. Our prayer over the coming months must be that we might become familiar with the way Jesus prayed and remained faithful to the will of his Father. We may then become clearer about how we play our full part in our local community.

## Around the Diocese in 22 Months...

Between the weekends of 29/30 November 2014 (Bishop Auckland) and 24/25 September this year (Forest Hall), Fr Jim will have visited each of the 177 Churches within the 150 parishes in the diocese and spoken at every weekend celebration of Mass about *Forward Together in Hope*. Here he shares some of his observations.

'It has been a fascinating journey. It is a rather obvious thing to say, but no two churches look alike, and there is no such thing as a 'typical' parish. Congregations have varied from 5 to over 200, from all white faces to a rich multi-ethnic mix of backgrounds and from a wide-age range to predominantly older people. Temperatures have also varied - from absolutely freezing to extremely warm. In one church in February it was warmer in the car park than in the building – the heating was to be renewed the following month. In some parishes there is a long and rich musical heritage and, in others, there is a reliance on varieties of 'Cynthia' – now played via a laptop – or the courage and commitment of one person leading the singing unaccompanied.

In some communities everyone remains in place until the final hymn is finished; in others I have seen parishioners leave the church after the priest has received Holy Communion – before any of the congregation have received. Some of us may be of an age when we remember the phrase that '*obligation is fulfilled if the person is there between the Offertory and the Priest's Communion*'. It is sad to see so many people leave rather than belong. Some of it may be to do with buses and so on, but it may also be that we have emphasised 'obligation to attend' and 'duty' rather than engagement, worship and community.

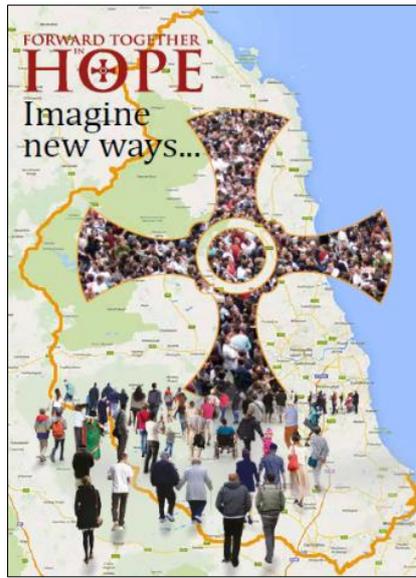
There is a very wide variety of ways congregations prepare for the celebration of Mass. In a minority

there is powerful silence, some have quiet music playing and, in others, there is lively conversation and greetings shared with loud enthusiasm. To sit unknown at the back of some churches as people come in and settle themselves can be an introduction to the aches and pains, the sorrows and joys of people in the congregation. A medical degree would have been of use on occasion as diagnoses and treatments for various parts of the anatomy were shared.

Many of the conversations after Mass have been around 'Why can't we get more priests from Africa or Eastern Europe?' 'Why can't we ordain married men, and women?' and so on. I wonder what lies behind these questions. Possibly a desire to keep things the way they were, with a parish church in almost every town

and village and a permanently dedicated priest attached to that parish. Great Britain is 2<sup>nd</sup> in the global league table of the ratio of priests to people, just below Malta. We must all continue to pray for and support and encourage those who are interested in considering a vocation to ordained ministry. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is also inviting us to explore more shared responsibility between priests and people to ensure we are viable and flourish in the future.

In some parts of the diocese there is real excitement about what the future might hold, in others there is deep anxiety. The documents referred to later tell of the vision and views of individuals, young people, deacons and priests. It would be good to look at them all seriously. The more we appreciate what others feel and how others see us, the more ready we can become to think profoundly about how we witness to Jesus in our communities.'



## Thanks from Bishop Séamus



In his Foreword to *Exploring the Way with Our Neighbours* Bishop Séamus highlighted the role that many people across the diocese are playing in making *Forward Together in Hope* a reality:

*'It is clear to me that the Holy Spirit is moving throughout our diocese. There was a great deal of work done by communities completing the very substantial questionnaire last year. There have been many lay people and clergy helping to review over 7,000 documents, surveys from young people, individuals and parishes, as well as a small team looking at the comments of priests and deacons.'*

Lay representatives and clergy in every parish are performing a vital role in communicating and coordinating the work at local level. We rely very heavily on their generosity and energy and are enormously grateful for all of their efforts.

In recent months a further 50 volunteers have been involved in a huge amount of work preparing the **Observations** now available in every parish. Those few pages are the result of work that actually began in January 2014 with the first thoughts about a Questionnaire for every parish community. Drafts of the Questionnaire and other surveys were pored over by focus groups. Once it was distributed and completed, every one of the parish responses was reviewed by two independent reviewers. These two reviews were moderated by independent moderators and the final version formatted by colleagues in our diocesan office. Volunteers were also centrally involved in the collation of survey responses – coding and inputting vast amounts of data. Bishop Séamus has written to those involved in this latest activity thanking them for their work, he says:

*'I know that you only had a limited time to complete your work, but I'm sure that you now have a valuable insight into how parishes think, what they see as important and what their hopes and fear are about the future. We will all be looking at how we can work more closely in partnership with other communities and how leadership can be shared with lay men and women in the future'.*

The *Forward Together in Hope* team can only add our own thanks to these volunteers and to everyone else who has been involved in any aspect of the project recently - you are a great group of people!



Yet another 'happy band of volunteers' – breathing a sigh of relief after collating and packaging resources for parishes.

## Read, Reflect and Pray

A wide range of documents has been made available to parishes recently via *Forward Together in Hope* lay representatives and parish priests. Most of these are also available on the website at [www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk). Different people will take different things from these documents and the hope is that they spark new avenues of thinking and action. Here we give a brief synopsis of what is in each:

- *Exploring the Way with Our Neighbours*. This provides an overview of all of the new resources and puts them in the context of the *Forward Together in Hope* journey. It is probably a good idea to read this one first.

- *Observations on Your Parish Questionnaire* - provides some impartial observations on the parish questionnaires completed last year following a detailed review process. These are set out under the 10 key headings used throughout the *Forward Together in Hope* process so far.
- *A Profile of Your Parish in Numbers* - sets out some numerical information about various facets of parish life and allows you to see your parish in relation to your deanery and our diocese as a whole.
- *From Parish to Partnership* – a document to support parishes in moving towards new partnership arrangements. It highlights areas for consideration when developing extended partnership proposals. This document will be supplemented in early September by a template which each area will complete and return by 27<sup>th</sup> November.
- *Summaries of recent surveys of individuals, young people and clergy in the diocese* - to inform and challenge our thinking. These are:
  - *Challenges and Hopes* – 1720 perspectives on the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
  - *The Way We See It* – How young people view the Catholic Church in the Diocese.
  - *What Our Clergy are Saying*- setting out thoughts from priests and deacons about their ministry today and into the future.
- *Some Food for Thought* – a compilation of practical ideas mentioned by communities in their parish questionnaires. It is hoped that this can be the start of an ongoing celebration and sharing of the wealth of good ideas and practice taking place in all parts of the diocese.
- *Imagine new ways...* – a short leaflet setting out what is happening over the months ahead and inviting everyone to get involved. This has been provided in sufficient quantities for distribution to all parishioners – and includes a short ‘tear-off’ questionnaire which can be used to seek views of parishioners about Partnership and Leadership.



### Some Ideas for Using the Resources

We have received many positive (and one or two quite justified critical) comments about the parish **Observations** and other documents that were distributed over the first two weekends of July. Every parish priest, deacon and parish representative received hard copies and a disc with everything on it in two formats, PDF and Word. This was to enable them to be copied and to be left at the back of church for people to take and read.

Many parishes have now copied the parish **Observations** and **Profile** for each family in the parish. This is an excellent idea as it gives every parishioner the opportunity to become more fully aware of the reality of the community. We would urge all parishes to follow the example of those who have done so.

Some deaneries have checked that it is appropriate for the other parishes in their deanery to receive copies of all parish **Observations** and **Profiles**. This is a really good approach to help prepare for the discussions that will take place in the autumn. We will be exploring how best to work more closely with neighbouring communities, so the more we can get to know each other the better.

Some parishes have put the **Observations** and **Profile** on their parish website. It is important to remember that ‘anyone in the world’ could have access to that information, but if the community

is happy with that, it is certainly another way of letting everyone know about them.

Some parish representatives are taking a couple of paragraphs from some of the documents and including them in their parish newsletter. They have found that this has whetted the appetite of parishioners who have then asked to look at the full documents.

All of these documents – apart from parish **Observations** and **Profiles** – are online, so please do delve into them. You may even be inspired to copy them and bring them on holiday for your beach reading.

### Vicariate Meetings

Over the last couple of months we have had two very fruitful meetings with Bishop Séamus, the Vicar General, 5 Episcopal Vicars and all of the Deans. We have been looking at how we can engage everyone in the diocese in discussions about the next stages of *Forward Together in Hope*. Over the months between now and the beginning of Advent – 27<sup>th</sup> November – every parish will be looking at its own **Observations** and then, alongside neighbouring parishes, how communities can begin to work more closely in partnership with their neighbours.

Our 18 deaneries are organised into 5 Episcopal Vicariate areas. We've been saying for some time now that the only fixed boundary in the diocese is the diocesan boundary. We can't mess with the River Tees, the River Tweed, the North Sea or the Pennines, but we can think about how things are shaped within that area.

Deans and Episcopal Vicars have suggested that the *Forward Together in Hope* team holds open meetings in each of the Vicariate areas. The good thing about this from our point of view is that the whole team – Jim, Tony, Nancy and Amy Cameron – our new team member – can attend each meeting. The advantage from everyone else's perspective is that we can begin to explore more

practically what new partnerships might look like within those areas.

We already have dates and venues for some of the meetings, and all arrangements will be publicised once finalised. At present, the **South Tyneside and Gateshead** Vicariate will meet at St Joseph's Gateshead at 7.00pm on Thursday 29 September, the **Northumberland** Vicariate will meet at St Aidan's Ashington on Thursday 6 October at 7.00pm, the **Cleveland and South Durham** meeting is on Wednesday 12 October and the **Newcastle and North Tyneside** Vicariate will meet on Wednesday 19 October. We look forward to seeing you at one or other of these meetings. They are open to all – including Episcopal Vicars, deans, priests, deacons, *Forward Together in Hope* representatives, representatives from schools and parishes. If you are not able to attend a meeting in your own area, please feel free to attend one of the others at your convenience. Full details will be available soon.

### Hope in the Year of Mercy

When Pope Francis announced the Year of Mercy, there was a bit of concern about how we could do justice to this as well as to the crucial work involved in *Forward Together in Hope*.

However, as we read the document produced by the Pope, we realised that he was, in a way, offering part of a manifesto for a Church that would be more outward looking and seeing her mission as bringing Christ to the world outside the doors of our church buildings.

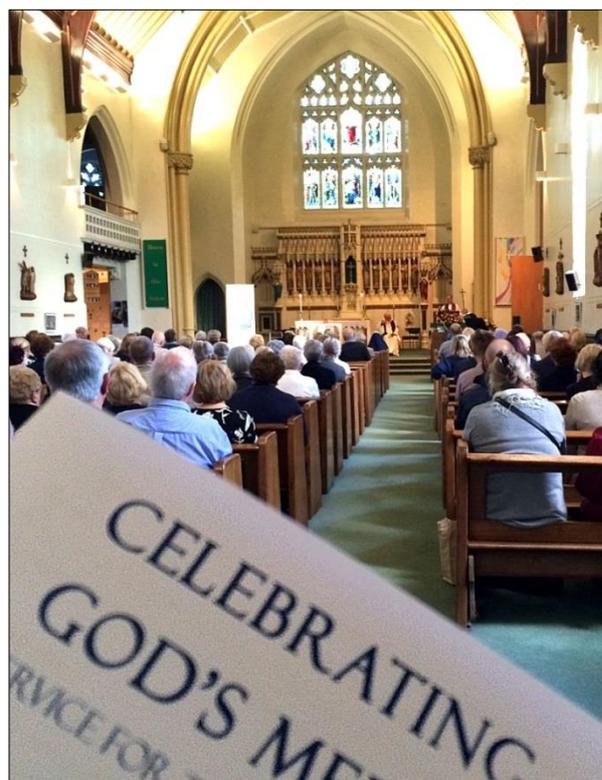
Two major initiatives have marked this Year of Mercy – along with many others – but these were particular examples of what *Forward Together in Hope* means.



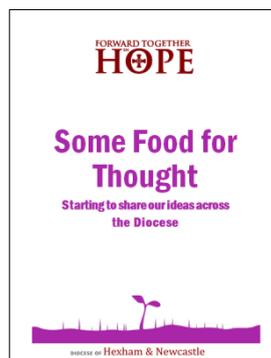
Many of you will have experienced one of the *Celebrating God's Mercy* services held around the diocese. These were the result of two diocesan teams, Spirituality and Evangelisation, working together. As they were held at deanery level, they also offered an opportunity for parishes to work together to prepare the welcome, the hospitality, the Readings and the music. As one person involved in bringing several music groups together put it, "This is what *Forward Together in Hope* is all about! This makes it real... and so much better doing it together than trying to do it all on our own."

Another series of events has been the *Voices of Mercy*. Again, this has been a partnership between diocesan departments – Spirituality, Interfaith dialogue and Justice and Peace. The idea was to look at the Corporal Works of Mercy and invite people actively involved in them to talk about their work. The most recent of these saw Alison Gelder, CEO of Housing Justice (formerly the Catholic Housing Aid Society) come to talk about the growing problem of homelessness. This was inspiring and our advertising attracted Bishop Mark Bryant of Jarrow who is keenly interested in social justice issues. What was interesting about this evening was that it came soon after the **Observation** reports had been returned and people were increasingly aware of the need to look seriously and creatively at the issue of buildings surplus to our needs. Links were made – and two issues that could have been depressing (closure of buildings – and increasing numbers of homeless people) generated a lot of ideas and enthusiasm for working together to make a difference to some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Over the summer, our diocesan family is united in prayer with several parishes being prayed for each day. You can find these listed on the spiritualityHN Facebook page or at the bottom of the daily email from the Spirituality Department (contact [spirituality@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:spirituality@diocesehn.org.uk))



### Pinching and Sharing Your Best Ideas



We mentioned above that we had compiled some of the practical ideas from around the diocese into a booklet which we hope will spark further thoughts and more sharing. If you're doing something new, interesting or different please don't just keep it to yourself. Send us an e-mail and we'll find ways of sharing your creativity across the diocese.

### 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](http://www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk).

To contact one of the *Forward Together in Hope* team (Jim O'Keefe, Nancy Gash, Amy Cameron and Tony Sacco) e-mail: [hope@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:hope@diocesehn.org.uk) phone: 0191 243 3304.

