

## Forward Together in Hope Update: June 2015

### 1) The journey so far...

- Bishop Séamus announces the plans for *Forward Together in Hope* at two public meetings on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014. The text of the Bishop's input and other key resources are available [here](#).
- A Diocesan Development Group, chaired by the Vicar General and with lay and clergy membership meets every few weeks to oversee the work of *Forward Together in Hope*.
- Fr Jim O'Keefe appointed as Diocesan Development Director and Tony Sacco appointed as Diocesan Development Officer.
- [Pastoral letter](#) and initial [leaflet](#) distributed across parishes in mid-November 2014. Leaflet also made available for all school staff and governors.
- Meetings with the Council of Laity, Council of Priests and other key groups. Responses to questions posed can be found [here](#).
- Regular communications through the Diocesan website and the Northern Cross.
- Interviews with:
  - [Premier Christian Radio](#)
  - [The Tablet](#)
- Inputs by Jim O'Keefe at weekend masses across the Diocese.
- Bishop Séamus calls the Diocese to prayer with reflections in December 2014 in Newcastle and Hartlepool.
- *Forward Together in Hope* prayer cards issued widely throughout the Diocese.
- Nancy Gash appointed as Administrative Assistant in January 2015.
- Lay representatives identified for each parish community to help in communicating *Forward Together in Hope* and engaging people in the process.
- In late January 2015 the Diocesan Board of Directors endorsed the work undertaken to date and provided some key principles for the next stages, see: [Bishop Seamus looks into the future](#)



### *Preparing the Way*

- A resource pack for the *Preparing the Way* part of the journey issued through two [launch meetings](#) on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015. The materials aimed to assist parishes in getting ready to undertake a careful and prayerful self-evaluation from Pentecost onwards.
- Electronic versions of these materials provided to all Catholic schools in the Diocese.

### *Exploring the Way*

- Clergy and Lay representatives each received a range of materials at Pentecost including:
  - Exploring the Way Booklet (The key document to read first)
  - Parish Questionnaire
  - Parish Questionnaire Supplement
  - PowerPoint Presentation
  - One-page handout for copying to all parishioners
  - Spirituality resources including prayer for vocations
  - Disk with all of these resources plus additional items
  - Data Pack - hardcopy and electronic versions.
- The development of the Parish Questionnaire was supported by colleagues from the Centre for Catholic Studies at the University of Durham. A focus group of lay people and clergy provided valuable feedback on the initial draft.
- A further interview with Premier Christian Radio about the *Exploring the Way* stage is available [here](#).
- All materials (except individual parish data packs) available from the website: [www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk) and electronic versions of documents sent to each Catholic school.

### **2) What happens next?**

- Parishes are starting to run meetings to feed into the self-evaluation and questionnaire completion. It is expected that the process will involve a large number of people from parishes and schools inputting their thoughts and ideas.
- Work is underway to develop a questionnaire that provides the opportunity for any individual to offer comments about the present and the future of the Catholic Church in the Diocese. We are particularly keen to get responses from those Catholics who do not attend church regularly. The questionnaire will be distributed widely on-line and in hard-copy format by early July.
- Jim O'Keefe is continuing to visit parishes most weekends to provide an update on *Forward Together in Hope*.
- A networking meeting will take place on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July between 10am and 12 noon at St Robert's in Fenham. The aims of the event are:
  - a) To strengthen the communication with and between *Forward Together in Hope* lay representatives
  - b) To provide participants with an overview of the *Exploring the Way* process
  - c) To share good practice and ideas about how *Forward Together in Hope* is being approached in different ways across the Diocese.

All *Forward Together in Hope* lay representatives and parish priests are welcome to attend.

- Meetings are being arranged in each of the 18 deaneries between 7<sup>th</sup> September and 16<sup>th</sup> October. Tony Sacco and Jim O’Keefe are intending to divide the Diocese between them and will bring together priests, *Forward Together in Hope* lay representatives from each parish and representatives of Catholic schools in the Deanery to:
  - Hear a short update on the *Exploring the Way* stage of the process
  - Provide the opportunity for representatives to ask questions, make observations or clarify issues that are arising as a result of the self-evaluation process taking place in parishes
  - Share the approaches and good practice taking place in different communities
- A small amount of work has taken place to date to understand the particular role of young people in relation to *Forward Together in Hope*. This has included discussions with the Youth Council and others. We are now supplementing this with a focus group of those working directly with young people. This will meet initially in July and will result in the development of a more detailed plan for involving young people.
- Parish Questionnaires need to be completed on-line by Advent 2015. Details of the process for doing this will be made available to parishes in the Autumn. A period of analysis, validation and dialogue with parishes will then take place before recommendations are considered by a Diocesan-wide group of clergy and lay people ahead of decisions being made by Bishop Séamus.

### 3) Getting involved

*Forward Together in Hope* will require a lot of activity at local level. Please consider getting involved in this – speak with your lay contact or Parish Priest. Also, the *Forward Together in Hope* team at the Diocese is on the look-out for skilled volunteers who can support and contribute to this work in various ways.

### 4) Share your ideas

Already some really interesting and innovative ideas are emerging from parishes about how they are implementing *Forward Together in Hope*. Please send us details of any particular approaches you are using – and we will make these available to others across the Diocese.

### 5) 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, Tony Sacco and Nancy Gash) e-mail: [hope@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:hope@diocesehn.org.uk) or phone 0191 243 3304.



Tony Sacco – June 2015