

St Mary of the Angels Camelon

Forming a response to the Archbishop's Proposal

Monday 4th June 2018

The Journey so Far

- In 2015 the Archbishop issued a Pastoral Letter entitled “We have Found The Messiah”.
- The purpose of the letter was to “Address the people of the Archdiocese regarding the next steps that I believe we ought to take as an Archdiocese.”
- In his letter he speaks about The Church, The Eucharist, The present and the Future

The present

- By 2020 there will be only 33 diocesan priests to the celebrate the Eucharist.
- At present there are 111 parishes.
- Mass attendance is falling (28,000 out of approximately 113,000)
- This gives cause for concern
- We have undoubtedly arrived at a turning point.
- This is not a situation which we would wish, however, we have to acknowledge its existence, and admit it requires realistic assessment.
- There is already little doubt that change must come about for the greater good of us all. It is also true that some of those changes will be unpleasant for some.

- We should not be discouraged by this challenge.
- Old Testament – Times when the fortunes of the people were brought very low
 - The prophets speak about the causes of this
 - Unfaithfulness
 - Lack of prayer
 - Injustice
 - Compromise with secular values
 - And indeed bad shepherds.
- However, the prophets also had another vision:
 - it was a message of hope!

- Similarly the church of the New Testament experiences the same things.
 - As well powers outside the church there have been times of great scandal, confusion and division.
 - Jesus gives his promise that the powers of hell will not prevail against his church.
 - He promised to be with his church to the end of time.
 - When we contemplate our crucified and risen saviour, we discover that out of sorrow, distress, and even failure, God can bring new and glorious things for those who trust in his goodness.

The Future

- We must set about rebuilding God's household with hope and with joy.
- We need to rediscover the early church's vision of evangelical holiness, missionary fervour and commitment to practical charity.
- Like the church of the first few centuries we are called to be poorer but purer, to cope with fewer material resources but at the same time increase our spiritual resources. Pulling together into fewer but more concentrated parish centres will enable us to intensify our spiritual and evangelical activity.

- The reduced number of parish centres need to become powerhouses of devotion, catechesis, care and outreach.
- By better deploying our priestly resources we will also ensure that parish life remains firmly rooted in the Eucharist and the sacraments....Our combined communities should also increase our sense of mutual support and shared mission for clergy and laity together.
- We need holy people to build holy families
- Our new parishes should be communities that support and promote an authentically Catholic vision of marriage and the family as part of a coherent “Gospel of Life”.
- We must offer better support for those trying to live out his ideal.

- Many young families will undoubtedly welcome the mutual reinforcement that will come from being part of a larger parish community alongside other Catholic parents.
- Potential candidates for the priesthood and religious life are drawn into a more vibrant community of Spiritual, Pastoral and evangelical life.

Stage 2

- The Archbishop toured the whole of the diocese and met with every cluster.
- These were open meetings which everyone was invited to attend
- The Archbishop once more outlined his thoughts on where the diocese is at now and his vision for the future.
- He then invited each cluster to hold a series of three meetings.

Stage 3 – The Cluster meetings

- Current shared provision – What works well?
- What should stay as single parish provision?
 - Mass , Funerals, Devotions Children’s liturgy
- Moving Forward- signs and developments
 - As a cluster there was a keen sense that many more of our ministries must be lay-led, to decrease the Burden on priests.
 - Collaboration between parishes must become more intentional.
- Community outreach is felt as vital, but there was an awareness that too few parishioners are actively involved. Our missionary focus overall must be renewed.

- Liturgy was seen as a strength , however there was a realisation that our priests cannot be expected to continue as things currently stand.
- The role of laity was stressed and it seemed there was a need and openness for more formation and catechesis. - an understanding that we need to free up priests to live out their vocation and not be “managers”.

The Plant (Church Buildings)

- The Churches and halls are generally well maintained
- There was a question as to whether they were “fit for purpose” in a changing church?
- 2 hall are badly underused (at the time of the report)
- Need for a rolling maintenance program, and better budgeting.
- “firefighting” to maintain property is a drain on our priests.
- One “Radical idea” emerged that one of the churches should be “mothballed”. Four parishes becoming three might reduce costs and release capital. It was noted that this could lead to a potential loss of some parishioners

Finances

- Much debate about the cost of maintaining St Mary of the Angels
 - Coia – A Listed
 - Sense of injustice within the community as to the way the debt emerged.
- Discussion as to how the cluster could help?
- Having an uncertain future is having an impact on finances with people unwilling to throw good money after bad, given the inevitability of more debt and the certain costs involved in maintaining listed building.
- Need to increase revenue / develop new streams of income

- The other parishes finances are relatively healthy.
- Acknowledgment that more transparency is needed around parish finances.
 - Parishioners need to be better informed.

Spiritual Vibrancy

- 2 clear signs
 - Eucharist – We draw strength from our worship as a community
 - Outreach – Highly rated – however, most of those at the meeting were highly involved in outreach.
 - High level of internal vibrancy, but less vibrant “ad extra”
- Areas for growth
- Lay leadership
- Stewardship

Conclusion of the cluster meetings

- SMART goals
 - Catechesis
 - Stewardship
 - Lay leadership
- The process helped us to grow in self understanding
 - Young people were missing from the process
 - Likewise the Polish & Syro Malabar communities
 - Need to bridge the gap between attendance and participation
 - Above all we need to remember our identity and our mission in Christ.
 - Need for a clear vision and focussed pastoral planning across the archdiocese
 - This must come from the Bishop.

The next step

- The bishop took some time to read and digest the Cluster reports
 - Delayed process because some clusters did not meet the deadline
- The Bishop met with the priests of each deanery.
- The Bishop met and consulted with the Council of Priests.
 - 3 meetings to formulate the recommendations to the Bishop
- Pentecost – Letter of proposal to most parishes
 - Invitation to the parishes to respond to the proposal
 - Response due by 18th June

Our response

- How do we wish to respond to the proposal to merge with the other 2 parishes to become “The Parish of St Francis Xavier”?
- How do we wish to respond to the proposal to close St Mary of the Angels Church?
- Questions