

“Communion with Christ and Communion with one Another” as the theme we would embrace in our activities this year. The DPC which represents all of the People of God within our diocese advises me on how best to care for the pastoral activity within the diocese. Although still in its infancy, it too offers much promise for promoting real co-responsibility. At our October gathering, we had a magnificent talk from Mr Ned Prendergast on the future Church. He quoted the late Irish writer John McGahern, ‘All that survives does so by acquiring lovers’. The Church still has great lovers as witnessed by the zeal and dedication of so many people engaged in the daily rhythm of local parish and diocesan life.

Commissions

Each of the eight commissions reported on their areas of activity and it is remarkable how much is being done through these diocesan bodies. Here are a few examples to illustrate. Two fine young people, Gilbert Rice (Armagh) and Sinead Walsh (Clogherhead) from the Youth Commission, spoke passionately about World Youth Day on behalf of the 150 young pilgrims from this diocese. They were a joy to listen to and their own witness to the faith was captivating. Another example is the work of the Prayer & Spirituality Commission which continues to produce wonderful resources such as the Rosary CD, prayer cards for all occasions and rich resources for the liturgical seasons. All of the Commissions are doing sterling work within their own remits.

Ongoing Consultation

There was significant consultation with all of the parishes in the years preceding the establishing of the new Pastoral Areas. As we move forward into the next stages of pastoral planning I am keen to consult again with all of you about the issues that are emerging. To that end, I have asked OPRFM to organise a consultation process across the diocese to listen to parishioners and to collate the wisdom of the community as we journey forward together. Over the next few months, January and February, 2012 there will be a series of facilitated gatherings in all parishes and I will

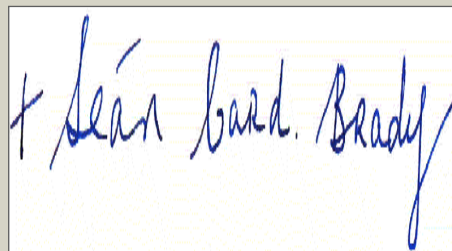
make a subsequent report on the findings in March/April 2012.

The Irish Catholic Bishops Conference together with The Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development have produced an excellent document in October 2011 entitled “Grouping Parishes for Mission; an Exploration of the Key Issues”. It is available from Veritas and I would recommend all parishes to familiarise themselves with its contents. I think it will provide very useful background material in advance of the parish gatherings.

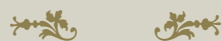
I am very conscious and appreciative of the presence of so many religious in the diocese. I wish to greet them and to say that we rely very much on the help of their prayers at this time.

Finally I want to congratulate all of you who continue to remain faithful to your Church and to your faith. I pray that in this season of Advent we would once again commit ourselves through the intercession of our mother Mary and all the saints to work together to realise our diocesan aim, “to be the Body of Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit, so that we can live like Jesus in our time and place sharing his compassionate love with all.”

With every blessing,



Cardinal Seán Brady, Archbishop of Armagh



ADVENT

PASTORAL LETTER



Cardinal Sean Brady
Archbishop of Armagh
December 2011

“To be the Body of Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit so that we can live like Jesus in our time and place showing his compassionate love to all”

November 2011

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

Greetings and good wishes to you as the Church begins another new Liturgical Year. It is over two years since I formally adopted the eighteen new pastoral areas which came into being in July 2009. Their emergence was our response to meet some of the major changes that confront us as we try to use our resources to provide the best response of the diocese. Although there have been some teething difficulties, by and large, the new structures have bedded down very well and there is clear evidence of great work being done by the Pastoral Area Resource Teams (PART).

Pastoral Areas

At the most recent meeting of the Diocesan Pastoral Council in October 2011 we had reports on many of the activities that have been undertaken by various pastoral areas.

These included:

Building up a spirit of communion with each other through regular meetings

Deepening a spirit of co-responsibility with clergy and laity

Facilitated Retreats and Planning days together

Planning and organising the visit of the Eucharistic Bell in preparation for the International Eucharistic Congress

Coordinating Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Coordinating engagement with the Spiritfest Conference in Armagh in 2011

Coordinating Bible Study & Reflection Groups

Arranging mass cover for holidays and sickness

Choosing names for the Pastoral Areas

Surveys to audit mass attendance

Rationalization of Masses

Communal Lenten/ Advent preparations

Publishing PART minutes in all local parish bulletins

Organising a Pastoral Area Newsletter three times per annum

Producing a booklet with details of all resources available within the Pastoral Area

Training

All of the above give a flavour of the huge interaction and work that is taking place. Side by side with this is the ongoing dedication and work of Parish Pastoral Councils, many of whom are in the process of renewing their membership. They are being trained by the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry (OPRFM) to exercise a vital role in animating the faith life of their parish under the guidance of their Parish Priest. I would encourage all parishes to avail of the services of OPRFM. Training for ministry is a vital element within the overall pastoral plan.

“Ministerial development is aimed at promoting co-responsibility of the whole people of God and thus enabling parishes to co-operate with each other in proclaiming the Word of God and furthering the mission of Christ in the world.”

(Grouping Parishes for Mission, An Exploration of Key Issues, Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, Irish Episcopal Conference, Veritas, 2011, p.44.)

I am delighted with the large numbers of laity who are studying Theology in the diocese. At present we have over sixty men and women drawn from a wide variety of parishes who are studying for degrees and certificates in Theology. They will provide a rich pool of talent that will enrich the lives of our diocese as we move forward. Moreover, we have two young men being ordained to the priesthood in 2012 and twelve men who are preparing for the diaconate with the first cohort being ordained in June 2013 with the help of God. All of these are wonderful signs of hope and promise and they give me great encouragement.

Priests

At our recent Priests' Conference in Enniskillen, Fr. Jim Corkery S. J. spoke about the changing role of the priest in these new configurations. He said the priest had to move from the apex to the centre. Not everything can or should be done by the priest as we move forward but the role of the ordained minister remains central to the vibrancy and the life of the faith community. I want to express my own continuing gratitude to all of our priests who are working selflessly to nurture a respectful co-responsibility in the Church.

Within the priestly fraternity I wish to acknowledge in a particular way the leadership of the Vicars General, Bishop Clifford, Dean Curry and of the Vicars Forane. I have been deeply impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment. They exercise a pivotal role in helping me to guide and provide for the needs of the Church in the Archdiocese of Armagh at this moment in its history.

Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC)

Another new structure that is entering its second year is the Diocesan Pastoral Council. We had a very full day in October when the Council met to hear reports from the Pastoral Areas and the eight Commissions all of whom are very active in promoting their various areas of interest. The DPC chose the Eucharistic Congress theme of