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Should we consider inviting more foreign priests to join us?

Priests

People are well disposed towards their clergy but angry at resistance of some clergy to support new developments. Awareness that many priests are overburdened and need to be encouraged.

Youth

We need to use more of our resources in caring for our youth. Young people complain about the staleness of much of the liturgical practice, the irrelevance of homilies and the absence of joy in our celebrations. Young people need to be encouraged and invited to belong and to participate fully.

Strategic

Some Pastoral Areas need to be expanded or altered. Co-responsibility needs to be clearly reflected in structures and decision-making.

There is a call to train lay people to be the living church in the world

We need to ensure that all parishes have a trained Parish Pastoral Council

Communication needs to be improved at levels of church life and ministry

There is an over dependence on the Mass. We need to encourage other spiritual resources such as prayer groups, Lectio divina, bible study etc.

Next Steps

The Rapporteurs will make a Report to the Pastoral Area Resource Teams in the latter part of May, 2012.

The Pastoral Area Resource Teams will be asked to communicate and promote the next steps within their area. These will include informing parishioners about the feedback from the diocese and outlining any initiatives which they propose to undertake in their area.

We have engaged Dr. Marie Ward (Trinity College Dublin) who will analyse the feedback from the overall consultation and then work with OPRFM, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Vicars forane to assist Bishop Clifford and myself in developing a strategic plan of action for the diocese.

Conclusion

This has been a very informative process and it highlights for me the great work that is being done in a faithful and dedicated way by many clergy and laity. The life of the diocese flourishes because of the prayer, the work and the commitment of those who love and serve God. I hope that the forthcoming International Eucharistic Congress in June 2012 will provide a great stimulus and boost to our plans for renewal in the diocese. Likewise, the Year of Faith (Porta Fidei) which will begin in October 2012, as directed by the Holy Father, is an opportunity for all of us to look again at the theology and wisdom of the Second Vatican Council. If we remain true to the promptings of the Holy Spirit all will be well. How to engage with those who are alienated or separated from the Church for whatever reason is a major task for all of us. I note that the Cursillo Movement addresses itself primarily, though not exclusively, to those baptised Christians estranged from the Church or who consider themselves far from Christ.

The work of evangelisation, the announcing of the Good News, can only be done in the power of the Spirit.

Prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit will be at the heart of any future move towards the opening of the Vatican Council

"Lord, renew Pentecost!"

Seán Brady

DIOCESAN REPORT

2012



Cardinal Sean Brady
Archbishop of Armagh

April 2012

Lord, Renew your wonders in this our day as by a new Pentecost!

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ, Statistics

During February there were 36 individual parish consultations and 6 Pastoral Area consultations.

There were 11 sessions with second level senior students in their respective schools and with 2 youth clubs

Approximately 1300 people contributed.

The meetings were facilitated by ten rapporteurs and the overall process was coordinated by the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry.

Bishop Clifford and myself met with the Rapporteurs in early March for a comprehensive briefing.

Fr. Gerry Campbell made an interim Report to the Diocesan Pastoral Council at their meeting on March 11th and to the meeting of the Vicars forane on March 15th.

Main Recommendations from the Rapporteurs

- Distill information from the individual questionnaire responses and reported back to the people.
- We need to regularly inform people on major developments in the life of the diocese.
- We need better communication processes around the new structures, the work of the Commissions and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.
- We need to review the new structures. Are they workable or do they need to be overhauled?
- Priests are vulnerable in this new landscape. We need to provide support and encouragement for them.
- Evangelisation needs to be a priority. How do we touch people's spiritual lives? How do we become Christ-centred?

- Lay people need to be empowered in their co-responsibility for the sacramental life of the Church and for their pivotal role in creating a just society.
- We need to systematically train the members of the Pastoral Area Resource Teams and we need to develop a co-ordinated plan for the future.
- We need to look again at the make up of some of the Pastoral Areas. Some have not functioned well and some are too small to be effective
- There is a call to make it diocesan policy that all parishes have trained Parish Pastoral Councils.
- The alienated should be invited in and listened to respectfully
- Support parents and grandparents who have a major ministry to to their children and grandchildren.
- The potential of young people and their positive impact should be recognised and affirmed.

Summary of Main points from the Questionnaire Responses

Buildings

There is strong attachment to church buildings and minimal attachment to priests' residences. There is an intellectual agreement that some churches will have to close in the future but there is strong emotional resistance to it not being "my" church. Generally there is a fear that it will be smaller rural churches that will face closure. Finance is recognized as a major issue that needs to be addressed.

Ongoing Training & Formation

There was significant affirmation for the theology courses that are ongoing. Request that these would be extended to include more pastoral and grass root theology/ spirituality courses.

Ongoing training of Parish Pastoral Councils and Pastoral Area Resource Teams is seen as crucial for the future wellbeing of our diocese. There is a recognition that parents and grandparents have a vital role to play in the religious education of children and they need to be supported in this role.

Pastoral Ministry

There is still a high dependency on the priest and many had difficulty envisaging a future parish without a resident priest. There is great openness to relieve the clergy of administrative and financial responsibilities but less understanding of the potential for lay ministry within the Pastoral Area. There is a worry that many of the volunteers are getting older and a new younger cohort is not available or willing to replace them

There is awareness that we need to develop a competent stratum of lay leadership. There is some suspicion that there is only lip service paid to this by some clergy who are reluctant to embrace the concept of co-responsibility.

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