

# Planning the Way Forward for Sheffield Parishes

Report of the initial meeting of the *Sheffield Parishes Consultation Group*, held: Thursday March 30<sup>th</sup> 2017, Hallam Pastoral Centre

For distribution to all parishes in the Sheffield North and Sheffield South Deaneries

Bishop Ralph has asked the two Sheffield Deans, Fr. Paul O'Hara (Sheffield South) and Fr. Martin Trask (Sheffield North) to explore how the Church can continue to flourish in Sheffield given the current situation of parishes and the projected numbers of priests. In order to carry out this responsibility, the deans have invited all parishes in the two deaneries to participate in a programme of reflection, discernment and sharing. The deans have also formed a small steering group comprised of lay people and clergy from both deaneries to co-ordinate the process of providing observations and suggestions to Bishop Ralph arising from these activities and to ensure that the deliberations, proposal and decisions are communicated within the diocese. The responsibility for deciding to implement any changes resides with the Bishop.

This was the first meeting inviting parishes in the deaneries of Sheffield North and Sheffield South to reflect upon the current and projected situation for Catholic parishes in the Sheffield area. As such, it did not attempt to agree a plan or fix criteria for arriving at any recommendations. Rather, it allowed the questions at hand to be raised, and for initial conversations within and between parishes to begin as part of a process of discernment.

- 60 people attended, representing 18 Sheffield parishes.
- Attendees included laity, religious, priests and deacons.
- The meeting was convened and chaired by the two deans of Sheffield (Fr. Martin Trask and Fr. Paul O'Hara).

After opening in prayer, the meeting progressed through three main stages:

- 1) The Current Situation and Possible Models for the Future
- 2) Parish Discussions
- 3) Next Steps.

The meeting closed with prayer. A further meeting will be held in July, after reflection on how to shape the process, taking into account the conversation in this first meeting.

## **Part 1: The Current Situation and Possible Models for the Future**

*Fr Martin summarized the current situation and introduced the main themes of the meeting:*

It would be wonderful if we experienced a sudden massive increase in Congregation numbers in all our churches and an accompanying increase in local vocations and priestly ordinations within six years. At the moment this seems unlikely and so this meeting is an opportunity for all of us as the People of God in Sheffield to plan ahead for the future together based upon current trends. In 2018 there will be 16 active priests in Sheffield. In the following six years four priests will have reached the age of retirement. This does not take into account other factors such as death, illness or clergy moves.

Bishop Ralph has already said, in a recent Hallam News, that bringing in more priests from abroad was not the answer. The ratio of priests per mass goers in Hallam is still far better than in Africa and India so it would be unjust to ask those countries to send priests over here. So we must rely mainly upon our local diocesan priests.

Most of us do not like change but often it comes upon us by necessity. Whatever the perceived timescale may be for your particular Parish we are most likely facing a future where priests will need to cover larger areas and so will need to be free enough to do so without neglecting the priestly duties for which they were called and ordained.

This could be a golden opportunity to further develop all the complementary ministries of the People of God together in Sheffield. How can neighbouring parishes help each other? The Catholic Church has always favoured the poor in its Mission. How do we ensure that the poor are not neglected? Evangelisation is an essential part of being Christian. How can we remain faithful to the gospel and bring the Good News to others? If our parish is rich in a particular resource, are we willing to share? Some of you may be ready to move forward on these ideas whilst others may need more time to reflect and work on the various possibilities.

Despite having fewer priests and a fall in congregations, this planning could be an opportunity to build on what we have, and by working together, create flourishing and nurturing worshipping communities in Sheffield.

*Three possible models were introduced for discussion*

*Model 1: "Twinning"*

Two (perhaps more) parishes would share resources and clergy including a single parish priest, aligning mass times and other activities across the parishes. The two parishes might in time be canonically merged into a larger parish with one or more mass centres.

*Model 2: "Liturgical Centres"*

Sunday Mass is celebrated at a smaller number of large churches, allowing for concentration and development of liturgical excellence. Local faith communities would be maintained (perhaps corresponding to existing parishes) but a number of these communities would come together at the large central church to celebrate mass on Sunday. Apart from the main Sunday celebration, mass would still be celebrated during the week or on occasions throughout the year at all centres. The area would be served by a number of clergy, who would optionally live together at the main church.

*Model 3: "Team Ministry"*

A group of clergy (living together or separately) serve a larger pastoral area composed of several faith communities (perhaps existing parishes) without any one priest being specifically connected to any one local community. This differs from model two in that mass would continue to be celebrated in each local community. For both practical and theological reasons, the Mass Centres would generally gather around one mass on a Sunday (although in large communities, this may not be possible).

All models, but particularly Models 2 and 3 would require the development of lay, religious or diaconal roles in the administration and pastoral work of the parish. In all models, parishes would have a parish priest (or a group of priests, with one named as moderator) to direct the pastoral care and be answerable to the Bishop for the parish(es).

The parishes divided into three groups, based on geography ( Sheffield North, Sheffield South-East, Sheffield South-West) to discuss two questions:

- *What are the important principles in discerning a way forward for the Church in Sheffield?*
- *What initial feedback, if any, do you have on the feasibility of each of the three models for your parishes?*

The parish grouping are include in Appendix A

The key points which each group shared with the meeting are summarised below:

## **Part 2 – Feedback from Groups**

### **Sheffield North**

#### *Principles and Priorities*

1. Not just about the parishioners but also the priests. Each model has particular challenges for clergy.
2. Sustainability of any solution must be considered
3. Maintaining parish identity
4. We'll need a period of consultation and reflection (discernment) back in our parishes
5. To make viable decisions we'll need more data. (Not only parish census information but other geographical information like transport links)
6. One solution is not likely to be appropriate to every situation or parishioner
7. Parishes where there is a single Sunday mass have a greater sense of community (St. Mary's Penistone is the example)
8. Increasing participation and leadership from the laity is needed => lay formation.
9. Any solution should be for the long term. Start on the final solution now. Don't do an interim to only have to change again soon. Setup what the final model is now and move to that.
10. An effective administration system is key and training/formation will be necessary. Can we train administrators?

#### *Initial Response to the Three Models*

##### **Model 1 – Parish Twinning.**

More data will be needed to do it right

A greater understanding of strengths and weaknesses of each parish.

Positive experience regarding effective use of resources from Penistone/Deepcar

Positive experience from Priest perspective (St Mary's High Green)

##### **Model 2 – Larger groupings with a single rotating Sunday service**

Priests don't necessarily want to co-habit

Will the priest lose the connection to the community (also a factor in Model 3). With parish twinning this is thought to be less of an issue.

Key is what the community mass centres do on a Sunday.

##### **Model 3 – Team ministry.**

Key question is as above and probably more apparent

This is probably the long term solution and should be worked towards now

Breaking up of communities is not the answer

Need to communicate this positively. So not a problem but an opportunity to embrace change and for the laity to participate more in what is "our" collective church

## **Sheffield South-East**

First part of a way forward is to challenge parish community as to what they can do themselves now

### *Principles and Priorities*

- Hope and vision in revitalizing the life of a parish church E.g. St Charles - brought more groups to use the Church (Polish, Jesus Youth, Catholic immigrant communities)
- Revitalizing effect of providing : adoration, daily mass, devotions, importance of Prayer
- Essential to maintain Church presence in poorer areas = mission
- People are the Church (not the building)
- Need to foster vocations

How to sustain and develop church communities?

- Important of training in roles for catechesis, mission etc.
- Balanced with realities of smaller parishes and more elderly congregations in some cases

## **Sheffield South-West**

### *Principles and Priorities*

- Need to understand why changes are necessary and what is the goal?
- This is an opportunity as well as a challenge
- Use the gifts of the laity : fulfil the vision of Vatican II
- Make more use of Eucharistic ministers and deacons
- Need more time to arrive at a decision (but perhaps not too much time), but critically need objectives and clear plan.

### *Initial Response to the Three Models*

- Examine the possible adoption of a 'Doncaster Model' – took 12 year to tune this, but Sheffield should take less time to apply.
- Concerns with twinning model: loss of local identity, overload on priests.
- Proposed Model Three (team ministry) generally viewed positively.

## **Overall**

In the conversations and the subsequent whole group discussion some key points emerged:

- Realistic acceptance that change is needed, and that more than a short-term plan should be implemented
- Sense of "We've been here before; let's actually make the changes this time."
- See this an opportunity for positive change especially with regard to use of the laity and evangelization/mission
- Local Catholic presence in the community seen as very important
- Need for formation, training across range of roles and competencies.

## Part 3: Next Steps

### Clarify Organisation and Goals

- This is an initiative of the Sheffield Deans, in response to a request from the Bishop and the Vicar General to recommend ways in which the Catholic Church in Sheffield parishes can continue to flourish, given the actual and projected situation regarding priests and parishes.
- A small steering group (working party) will facilitate the process, led by the Deans (see Appendix C)
- A larger group, similar to the composition of the March 30<sup>th</sup> meeting, with each parish invited, will be the initial forum for discussing and discerning proposals for the Sheffield area, and for working with neighbouring parishes on specific local opportunities

### Next Meeting

- July 14/21 2017 (TBC), Hallam Pastoral Centre 7pm-9pm
- This meeting is intended to bring together input from wider Parish consultations (as wide as possible), following the first meeting.
- In order to prepare for this, Sacred Heart parish has shared a very short questionnaire which is recommended for widespread use and has been distributed with this report. (Other means of hearing the voices of the parish may be more appropriate in some cases. However the parish is consulted, the key questions to consider are :
  - *What is important to your parish today?*
  - *What are the most important factors to be taken into account when deciding on changes for your Parish?*
- However it is collected, **this information needs to be provided for each parish to the appropriate dean by June 10<sup>th</sup>** to allow it to be used to plan the July meeting:
  - Fr Martin (Sheffield North): [stthomasmoresheffield@gmail.com](mailto:stthomasmoresheffield@gmail.com)
  - Fr Paul (Sheffield South): [lol.church@btinternet.com](mailto:lol.church@btinternet.com)

### Data on Parishes

- Core data from the current diocesan year book is included in Appendix B.
- Further information gathering (for example, transport links) will be done at a local level as more concrete proposals for working together emerge.

### Resources

- The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle is in the middle of a major programme of reorganisation and renewal, called Forward Together in Hope. Although this is a diocesan-wide programme, it is asking many of the same questions that we have for Sheffield. In particular, Forward Together in Hope makes use of the model of “partnerships” in pastoral areas, similar to “Model Three (Team Ministry)” which we discussed. There are some very useful resources available at: <http://hope.rcdhn.org.uk/>

## **Appendix A: Parish Groupings**

For the purposes of discussions, parishes from both current deaneries were distributed among three groups. The reflect an older three deanery model in Sheffield, and could form a three broad 'Pastoral Areas' **for the purposes of starting our discussion on what *Model Three* (Team Ministry) might look like in practice.**

### **North**

St Ann  
St Catherine  
St Mary  
St Patrick  
Sacred Heart  
St Thomas More

### **South-East**

St Marie (Cathedral)  
St Charles  
Holy Family  
St Joseph  
Our Lady of Lourdes  
St Oswald  
St Theresa

### **South-West**

St Francis  
Mother of God  
Our Lady & St Thomas  
St Vincent  
St William

## Appendix B: Parish Data

Based on the 2017 yearbook, numerical data for each parish is as follows (grouped into three geographical areas as used in the meeting: N, SE, SW)

<b>Parish</b>	<b>Baptisms</b>	<b>Receptions</b>	<b>First Communion</b>	<b>Confirmations</b>	<b>Marriages</b>	<b>Deaths</b>	<b>Catechumens</b>	<b>Catechists</b>	<b>Members of Associations</b>	<b>Pastoral Assistants</b>	<b>Mass Attendance</b>	<b>Estimated Population</b>
St Ann	22	0	10	9	4	15	1	31	19	5	207	850
St Catherine	12	4	23	5	2	16	6	16	12	1	210	500
St Mary	15	0	12	3	0	5	2	16	0	2	163	900
St Patrick	29	3	14	5	1	20	0	10	13	1	302	1840
Sacred Heart	62	7	36	15	14	24	9	23	69	3	322	1850
St Thomas												
More	11	0	3	0	0	5	4	6	5	0	131	1000
<b>Cathedral</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>717</b>	<b>450</b>
St Charles	18	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	49	100
Holy Family	11	0	4	0	1	3	2	22	100	0	106	500
St Joseph	9	1	2	1	4	14	6	2	14	1	244	1150
Our Lady of Lourdes	14	0	21	22	4	11	6	8	0	0	293	1000
St Oswald	39	4	18	6	0	3	9	19	15	8	70	70
St Theresa	21	2	9	4	1	13	0	0	2	1	176	1000
St Francis	10	0	14	0	1	7	0	2	71	0	245	850
Mother of God	27	1	31	1	4	23	2	22	65	0	521	1875
Our Lady & St Thomas	17	0	18	24	4	10	1	5	16	0	381	650
St Vincent	14	2	24	5	5	18	3	10	32	0	349	900
St William	28	3	29	3	3	12	8	53	27	1	415	1800
<i>Catholic Chaplaincy</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>2000</i>

## **Appendix C: Working Party**

The Sheffield Parishes Consultation Group (the “large meeting”) had around 60 attendees. A smaller group to facilitate the process of gathering information and recommendations is being formed by the Deans and will comprise:

- Dean of Sheffield South (Fr. Paul O’Hara)
- Dean of Sheffield North (Fr Martin Trask)
- Up to three clergy and three laity from each of the current deaneries
- Diocesan staff (e.g. Adult Formation) and other members to be co-opted as required at the discretion of the deans.
- The deans will take turns to chair the meeting.
- The output of the Steering Group, and the larger Sheffield Parishes meetings will be reported to Bishop Ralph and communicated to all Sheffield Parishes.

The first meeting of the working party, at which this future composition was discussed, met April 8<sup>th</sup> 2017.

**Attendees:** Fr. Martin Trask, Fr. Paul O’Hara, Deacon Stephen Parker, Greg Ryan (Adult Formation), Denise Butterell, Pauline McConnon, Fr. Shaun Smith.

In addition to discussing how parishes and deaneries could be adequately represented and engaged in both the Working Party and the Sheffield Parishes Consultation Group, the meeting reviewed the key feedback from the initial meeting with parishes.

- Positive aspects of the all-Sheffield meeting included people's open-ness and willingness to change.
- Important to root this process in prayer and in seeking vibrant and flourishing parishes in all areas.
- Recognition of the value of the whole community gathering for One Mass at the weekend (where the church is big enough to take everyone).
- Some people had come with the model in their minds of pairing parishes, but others did not want to spend effort implementing a model that would require further upheaval later on. They were ready to think about a model of change that was bigger, the pastoral areas, whether or not the priests lived together.

On the basis of these observations, it was suggested in the working party that the way forward could be modelled on the way in which the discussion groups were divided, along the lines of 3 deaneries in the past - North, South-West, South-East. Within each of those three areas, there could be a flexible plan developed that would include contingencies to deal with the detailed arrangements that would need to be made.

The next meeting of the **Sheffield Parishes Consultation Group** will be Thursday July 20<sup>th</sup>, 7pm at the Hallam Pastoral Centre)

Prior to this, **we ask all parishes to engage in some exercise of consultation**, with a deadline of 10th June, to leave room for collation and analysis in time for July 20th.

This could be with the survey that has already been circulated, or some form of consultation that would invite parishioners to address the questions:

- What's important to you about your parish?
- In deciding the future, what factors are most important to you?

The next meeting of the **Working Party** is June 26<sup>th</sup>, 7pm (venue TBC)