



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Preparing the Way Consultation 2015 Summary Report

I need to register immediately my thanks for the great interest shown by so many priests, religious and people in the whole process of this Consultation. The breadth of comment and the reflection of the wealth of experience are making the whole process of consultation something dynamic and creative. People of all different ages and experience, from every corner of the Diocese and drawn from many different cultures and traditions, have spoken of the priorities and the challenges that face us and of their experience of Church and the celebration of Faith in their lives which will help to indicate the way ahead.

The consultation asked a series of questions. The consensus provided in the answers, on many subjects, allows me to make a number of decisions with great confidence that there is a general agreement and desire for certain things to be put in place. Some matters will need additional thought and work or take time to implement and develop. It is important we recognise that opposing voices may well bring important wisdom for consideration and help to refine our thinking and to be more aware of the impact of what we are doing.

In the following pages, I outline briefly the responses to the consultation questions and any decisions that I have reached about them. But this is only a Summary Report and there is much greater detail given in the full report which is available on the diocesan website (www.salforddiocese.net) or from your parish priest.

A Changing Church

I must step back for a moment from the questions of the Consultation to speak about the context in which we now find ourselves, as the Church in the Diocese of Salford. Manifestly, we live in a changing world and, while remaining true to the doctrines of the Church, we must adapt and be a changing Church. We must plan for the future and, given the reduction in the number of priests available for pastoral ministry, the planning needs to be radical.

In order to realistically realign ourselves for the future, we must now look to reducing our current 150 parishes. Given the geography of the Diocese and the Catholic population (both in terms of those who attend Mass and those who do not) 75 parishes will allow for a reasonable distribution of church buildings, with some of those future parishes having more than one church. Pope Francis and the recent Proclaim 15 initiative from the Bishops' Conference urge us to think about creating "Missionary Parishes" and that must be our focus.

In this realignment task (spelt out in detail in the full report), I must rely on advice and the experience and knowledge of others, particularly the priests of the Diocese. But I will be asking them to bring the views and experience of their parishioners to planning meetings. Proposals will be brought back to the people of each deanery before final decisions are made.



Governance of the Diocese

In terms of its status as a registered charity, the Diocese is governed by Trustees, currently all clerical. I am very encouraged that 93.8% of respondents said we should appoint lay trustees and so **I shall be inviting lay people of diverse expertise to join the Board of Trustees before the end of this calendar year.**

A very positive response (96.5%) to the suggestion of establishing a Diocesan Pastoral Council speaks of a real sense of energy and willingness to share responsibility within the life of the Diocese. Almost as strong (88.12%) was the approval of the suggestion that we seek to establish a pastoral council in each of the eight deaneries. However, the best way to determine membership of these groups brought a degree of diverse opinion. Consequently, given the clear desire to have both a Diocesan Pastoral Council and Deanery Pastoral Councils, **I have decided to create both, and as a first step towards doing so to invite an independent lay person to consider the membership of such councils as they exist elsewhere and to make recommendations to me about a suitable composition for our own councils.**

The Sacraments of Initiation: Age for Confirmation

The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has discussed the age of Confirmation and it is likely that the parameters for the celebration of this Sacrament will be 10-18 years. The practice in the Diocese of Salford must therefore change. In the Consultation, 46.64% suggest the final year in primary school, 32.28% suggest 12-14 years, 11.34% suggest 14-16 years of age and 3.74% would prefer it during the Sixth Form.



There remain a number of open questions, but having heard and reflected on the responses to the consultation the direction of travel is clear. We need to move to an older age, although at this stage I do not have a settled view as to what that age should be. **My decision is, therefore, that we need time to consider this matter further. I will be commissioning a small group of priests and people to investigate the resources being used elsewhere and to assist me in determining at what age we might deliver the best religious formation and how we may achieve a coherent and ongoing catechesis for the benefit of our young people.** I believe that the quality of the catechetical materials will be key in stimulating a growing commitment to Faith in our young people. I will ask this commission to report within twelve months so that, even if it is determined that Confirmation should be at the age of ten, there will be

adequate time to circulate the new catechetical materials and train the catechists in the parishes for our first group of ten year olds seeking Confirmation, in 2018.

The Sacraments of Initiation: Age for Reconciliation and First Communion

65.89% of responses indicated that First Reconciliation and First Communion be retained for children in Year 3. Of the 34.11% of those preferring change there was no consensus as to a preferred age. There was a more or less equal division for each of 8 to 11 years. Since there is no major appetite for change and no apparent consensus for any other age, **I think it best to leave these two Sacraments in Year 3.** What needs to change, however, is the on-going catechesis that helps a young person to grow in the knowledge of and practice of these Sacraments.

The Permanent Diaconate

90.18% of the responses were in favour of establishing the Permanent Diaconate in our Diocese. Salford Diocese is at present the only Diocese in England and Wales that does not have this ministry and it would seem reasonable that we should align ourselves with the practice in all the other dioceses. That said, there were some voices of caution and their comments are opinions to be welcomed. **I will be appointing a small team to establish a definition for what the Permanent Diaconate should be in the Diocese of Salford and to organise appropriate formation for those who present themselves and are considered suitable for diaconal formation.**

The Changing Church: Lay Participation

If we are to succeed in building a missionary Church and missionary parishes, there is one crucial element that cannot be ignored or understated. We must build on the competency, skills and dedication of the lay faithful. We must constantly seek to ensure that a priest is free to do what he is ordained to do in sacramental and pastoral ministry. But the encouragement of lay participation and responsibility is not just to be seen as assisting priests. The Laity provide an essential contribution to the life of the Church which they bring through the use of their own gifts and talents in the practical expression of the Gospel in every aspect of daily life.

The Training of Lay Volunteers: Diocesan Provision

If we are to expect individuals to generously fulfil tasks then we must provide any necessary training and a place for the referral of difficulties that need to be resolved. There must be diocesan provision so that no-one is given a responsibility without a clear understanding of the task being undertaken and appropriate training and resource so that the task can be confidently completed.

A particular mention needs to be made here of the training of catechists and all those who take part in faith formation of others; such as those who kindly organize children's liturgies. The passing of our Faith to others is a first priority. We are all asked to live our faith and show by example what we believe but the catechists have a particular role in teaching and explaining our faith to the young and to those who, as adults, feel drawn to learn about our faith and embrace it for themselves. While much depends on the materials and resources that can be provided to assist catechists, training is of great importance if those resources are to be used for their maximum benefit. It is essential, therefore, that care is given to the training of catechists and all those who accompany the young people in their growing knowledge of Faith.



Parish Leadership Teams

The Consultation asked if we should “look to establish a Parish Leadership Group” in each parish. Again the consensus was clear. 85.18% were in favour. And a resounding 72.04% thought that we should “seek to transfer the bulk of responsibility for parish administration from the clergy to the laity”. In every parish there would need to be a named Lead Catechist, Financial Administrator and a Safeguarding Officer. Larger parishes might usefully name other coordinators, appropriate for the administration of that particular parish, but the “Leadership Team” should be kept to a small number. It is not intended to be a parish council.



Interfaith Dialogue and Ecumenism

There are already many social projects directed and run by employees and volunteers of different Faiths and denominations. There is real success in working together. There is also a need for dialogue and understanding. It would be unrealistic for me to intend to be present at all the various fora of discussion and celebrations of prayer. **It is my intention to build a group of people who will represent the Diocese and the Catholic Church in meetings with other Faiths and in local ecumenical gatherings.**

A Parish and Youth Ministry Team

94.96% thought it appropriate to set up a diocesan team for youth ministry. The nurturing of our young people and their development in faith is clearly seen as a major priority by those responding to the Consultation. A Youth Ministry Team would, hopefully, be able to network the various initiatives that already exist, sharing the best practice. It could also invest in new initiatives, drawing on the experience of other Youth Teams in other Dioceses.



But it would be wrong to isolate our initiatives for the youth from the essential centre of our religious experience which is the parish. Pope Francis is urgent in his request for a missionary spirit in our parishes and we must see our communities as cohesive and integrated. There are certainly activities that may be organised specifically for our young people but we should not think of youth work as being in any way separate from the rest of our parish community.

It is my intention to appoint one or two priests to oversee the development of missionary parishes in which a youth ministry must have a particular priority. This project must also, of course, connect with our schools so that the trinity of "Family, Parish and School" may be a unity of common evangelisation.

Chaplaincies

Reducing the number of parishes to an optimal figure of 75 will also allow some flexibility for chaplaincy work. While lay chaplains are to be valued in prisons, hospitals and schools, there is also a need for priests to be available, especially for sacramental ministry. In some cases, this cannot simply be an aspect of ministry included in the portfolio of ministries within parish ministry. Some priests need to be fully available for chaplaincy work. These ministries lie at the heart of our service of the Gospel.

Vocations

There were a series of questions about “Vocations”. Just 25.53% of people responding said that they had given thought to a vocation to priesthood or religious life for themselves. 74.47% had not done so. Just 14.94% of people had suggested directly to another person that they might seriously consider priesthood or religious life. We need, I think, to cultivate a “Culture of Vocation”. God no doubt calls those whom He wishes to priesthood and religious life, as well as to many other vocations, particularly to marriage. There lies with us all a responsibility to ensure that those whom God calls should be alerted to hearing that call and to nurture, rather than ignore, it. It is important that young people especially should ask themselves the question “What is God asking of me?”

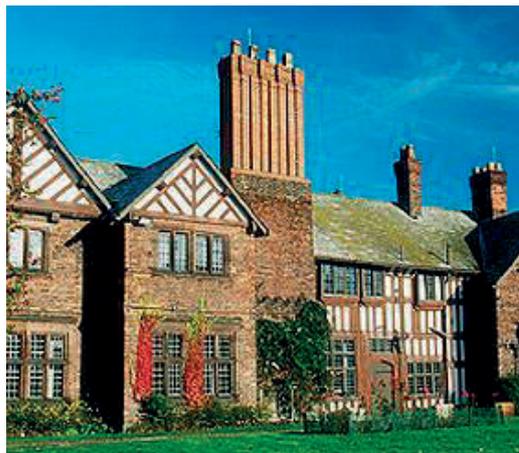
Our Catholic Schools

Our 208 schools and colleges are a wonderful legacy of the energy and enthusiasm of past generations. They are also an inestimable asset for the Catholic Church in Salford for the future. We should be very proud of them. Matters of Education feature frequently in Government legislation and there are continual changes and new requirements and regulations. We must be very vigilant in protecting the heritage of our Catholic schools and, while necessarily complying with all legislation, we must voice our concerns when our mission in education appears threatened or compromised by external influence.



Wardley Hall

82.05% were in favour of further investment being made so that Wardley Hall (and adjacent buildings) can be open to greater usage by priests and people of the diocese. Individual comments from the consultation also speak of the desirability that the bishop should reside at Wardley Hall. Further details about the Hall and about proposed investment are given in the full report but it is clear to me that, if we are to retain the Hall then we must take responsibility for a building which is now five hundred years old and establish an ongoing programme of maintenance and repair. Money can be found for this refurbishment and development. It should be stressed immediately that no money accrued from the closure or sale of any church will be used to improve facilities at Wardley Hall. If there are closures of churches or the sale of presbyteries, the money from such sales will be held by the parish in which those buildings are situated.



The Changing Church: A Development Plan

The realignment of parishes is clearly the foundation for the future development of the Diocese but all aspects of Diocesan Life need to be considered as part of the whole picture. While individual parishes will have their own particular character and priorities it is essential that we have a common missionary model that binds us together as Church. We must be listening to one another so as to benefit from shared initiatives and pastoral practice. There must be a keen sense of working together to achieve the best possible results. It is important, then, that we have a Development Plan which is constantly revisited and, where necessary, revised and updated. Statements about the Development Plan should be readily available on the Diocesan website. There will be an annual report on the state of the Diocese with a financial statement.

Essential Initiatives already being Developed

It is appropriate that I give an account here of four initiatives upon which I have already taken action. Each seemed to me to be both obvious and essential for the good working of the Diocese.

- I have convened the Clergy Welfare Committee. From both a pastoral and medical point of view it is essential that we care for those priests who become ill and for the priests who retire from ministry.
- It also seemed essential to form a Diocesan Property Committee. The Diocese has a considerable amount of property which is, of course, a great asset. That asset easily becomes a liability if not properly maintained and used.
- A new Communications Office is in the process of being set up at Cathedral Centre. This Office will be responsible for keeping the Diocesan website up to date. It will be a channel for news both within the Diocese and beyond.
- Salford Diocese has benefitted greatly from the presence and apostolate of numerous religious congregations. Their work still continues in many of our parishes. It is important that there be appropriate pastoral care for the religious and a firm bond with the Diocese. I have appointed a small team to provide care and assistance and to keep me informed of any concerns. The three Vicars for Religious are themselves members of religious congregations.

Conclusion

The purpose of the Consultation was to gain the opinions of as many people as wished to be involved and to begin to set the direction for the development of the Diocese of Salford for the next generation. I believe that it has achieved its purpose. The consensus on all questions has been a common discernment. There is now much work to be done so that we can achieve those things which are considered desirable, indeed vital, for our well-being and our further development as a missionary diocese.

As I close this report, I would ask you to continue to use that prayer "Stay with us, Lord, on our journey" as our common petition to the Lord, so that His Will may be done in all things and that we may be his ambassadors in all that we are about in His name.

May God bless you and your families. May we all be generous in embracing change and sensitive to one another as we take the next step of that journey together with the Lord.

+John
Bishop of Salford
November 2015

