

## **Rainham Catholic Church**

# **Towards A Vision For The Diocese**

### **Introduction**

The parish leadership team worked with the diocesan consultation document: *Towards A Vision For The Diocese* and the leaflet for parishes that was similarly titled. We decided to devote time to putting together a briefing paper for each section and also our own set of questions which might elicit responses more easily than those posed in the leaflet. The process was lengthy but worthwhile.

During Lent 2007 a briefing paper was distributed after mass each week for consideration and discussion. The following week, time was devoted during mass for a further explanation of the issues and then for parishioners to write down their responses on questionnaires.

What follows are the briefing papers including our revised questions and then summaries of the recordings adjusted back to the questions actually posed by the diocese. The levels of participation in this process are recorded with each week's report and readers will see that this report summarises several hundred responses to the diocesan consultation.

We hope that the diocesan authorities will be interested in the results of course, and that they will contribute in a measurable way to the diocesan vision for the future BUT the parish leadership team are also confident that a parish vision has been created along the way and we look forward to its implementation in the years to come.

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# Towards a Vision for the Diocese

## 1. Growing In Communion

We describe the Church as:

- (a) The People of God the Father:  
*"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart ... you are the People of God" (1Peter 2:9-10)*
- (b) The Body of Christ, His Son  
*"The bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that though there are many of us, we form a single body." (1Cor 10: 16-17)*
- (c) The Temple of God's Holy Spirit  
*"... all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit" (Eph 2:21-22)*

We experience the Church as a parish:

- (a) Like the Israelites who journeyed for forty years through the desert before reaching their promised land, we are trying to find the Way to our Promised Land. Together we try to discern the way God wants us to live.
- (b) Like the early Christians we meet in fellowship to celebrate in Eucharist all that Jesus has given to us and to recall his life and teachings so as to grow in knowledge of his Truth. Though many parts, (- from many parts of the world!), together we are one Body.
- (c) Where two or three gather in the name of the Lord, there, His Holy Spirit enables us to encounter God in person. The Liturgy – the prayer and worship of the Church, helps us grow in communion with each other and with God.

The issue for us to consider is how we can grow in this communion:

- (a) How we can lead more people closer to the land God promises, how we can deepen our knowledge of the faith and help others to do so too.
- (b) How we can deepen our experience of communion both with the Lord and with each other.
- (c) How we can help each other to experience the joys of prayer more fully and how we can open our community to the real promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The Archbishop wants to know what you think and so next week during mass you will be asked to answer the following questions:

- (1) What do we do well in this parish?
- (2) What should we be doing better?
- (3) What first made you feel part of this church or makes you feel part of it now?
- (4) What strengths or resources could we offer to other parishes?
- (5) What do you see in other parishes that gets your attention?
- (6) What further support might we need from our Diocese?

## Towards a Vision for the Diocese

### 2. Reaching Out In Mission

St. Teresa of Avilla expressed a clear understanding of the Church's mission: *Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which must look out Christ's compassion on the world.*

*Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.*

*Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now. Amen.*

In other words, our mission is Christ's continuing mission.

Through Baptism and Confirmation we are all appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself and *"the full meaning of this ministry is not simply to renew the life of the Church, but to enable the Church to transform the world"*. (*The Sign We Give*. - *Bishops' Conference of England & Wales 1995*) The Gospel and the Eucharist are the food we need for this journey to the Father's house.

We can express the Church's mission in several ways:

- (1) By growing in communion as Church, by growing in knowledge of God, by growing in the expression of His love in society we draw more people to the welcoming arms of the Lord.
- (2) By reaching across the boundaries to young people.
- (3) By reaching across the boundaries daily to colleagues, friends, family etc.
- (4) By reaching across the boundaries in chaplaincies to hospitals, schools etc.
- (5) By reaching across the boundaries to the lapsed.
- (6) By reaching across the boundaries to the wider world through CaFOD, overseas missions, etc.
- (7) By reaching across the boundaries to people of other faith.
- (8) By reaching across boundaries to people with disabilities.
- (9) By reaching across the boundaries in evangelising the people of Rainham.

The issue for us to consider is how we can be more missionary.

The Archbishop wants to know what you think and so next week during mass you will be asked to answer the following questions:

- (1) What do you think others can see in our parish life and mission that is valuable?
- (2) What would you say are the benefits of our chaplaincies to young people, schools and hospitals and our ministries in pastoral provision, overseas missions and development agencies?
- (3) What else do you think we should be doing?
- (4) Who do you think might feel excluded from church and what can be done about it?
- (5) How do we help those in need and do we help celebrate life's joys?
- (6) What more could we do?

## Towards a Vision for the Diocese

### 3. Facing the Future

*Everybody thinks of changing humanity. Hardly anyone thinks of changing themselves. (Anthony DeMello - The Song of the Bird)*

*It is especially important to listen, to hear, to understand, to discern together the present situation. Let us see what God is calling us to do and be in the future.*

*+ Kevin McDonald Listening 2004*

The early Christians could not rely on the past, nor did they have clear instructions from the Lord for the future. Reading the signs of the times and trusting in the presence of the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit, they proclaimed their way of action: "we and the Holy Spirit have agreed" (Acts 15:28). We too have to trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit and yet use our own imagination and reasoning power to find the way. We need a prophetic imagination to look into the future.

The bishop has apostolic succession and leads his church or diocese with an authority regulated by communion with the diocese of Rome and its bishop, the Pope. A bishop runs his diocese by appointing priests to lead parishes for him according to his instructions. The priest is currently therefore the bishop's agent enabling and guiding local democratic leadership and service and ensuring that the apostolic authority of the bishop is upheld. The parish will remain the primary focus of Faith. But how is leadership or the agency of the bishop to be secured for the future?

**FACT: There are no longer sufficient numbers of priests to undertake the traditional leadership role that they have done in the past.**

**Should we be considering strategies for increasing the number of priests available for appointment?**

Should we be recruiting and training more priests from abroad?

Should we be looking again at issues about married priests?

Should we be looking again at issues about women priests?

**Or should we have fewer parishes?**

Should we grasp the opportunity to rationalise, amalgamating parishes where appropriate?

**Or should we ask priests to run more than one parish?**

Many currently have more than one job and split their time accordingly. There would need to be greater levels of support centrally for specific tasks such as buildings maintenance and greater support locally both in terms of ministry and finances. Such appointments need not signal the end of the distinctiveness of

two Eucharistic communities. What about the leadership role itself; can it be changed? Is leading a parish the same as running or managing a parish?

**Should someone other than the priest be leading, running or managing the parish?**

Who else could lead or run parishes? Deacons? Pastoral Assistants? Professional managers? Would it be helpful if priests gave up the leadership of parishes so that they could concentrate on preaching God's Word and celebrating the sacraments?

The Archbishop wants to know what you think and so next week during mass you will be asked to answer the following questions:

- (1) What does the priest do now that could be done by others centrally in the diocese or locally in the parish? Please specify.
- (2) What areas of pastoral provision could this deanery share? E.g schools, hospitals, prisons, chaplaincy etc
- (3) If there were not enough priests available for the bishop to staff our parish or a neighbouring parish what would be your favoured solution?
- (4) What would you not like to see as a solution to the shortage of priests?

## **Rainham Catholic Church**

### **Theme 1: Growing In Communion (243 contributions)**

#### **1. What and how do we celebrate really well in our parish?**

- A very large number feels that we celebrate being a parish really well – 75 people speak of its friendliness, and 70 about us being a real community with others specifically mentioning groups they are proud to belong to. Another 11 speak of the events and functions that we run.
- Many people (45) mention how much they feel welcomed on a Sunday with 6 more saying that being asked to take part in the offertory procession had been significant for them.
- The wide participation in parish activity is seen as important with 51 remarking that there are few barriers – not age, or disability or gender. Another 12 comment how good it has been to be able to accept roles as volunteers and another 15 specifically mention how good it was to be empowered in ministry.
- Many (16) say that the spirituality and prayer life of the parish is an inspiration and 6 others speak of the preaching in this light
- Many (25) appreciate the organisation at the heart of the parish.
- Our liturgy and many individual services – particularly Reconciliation - is identified by 35 as being of good and uplifting quality. Another 14 express appreciation for the liturgical music and there are further comments about altar displays and the beauty of both our churches.
- The same number identifies our pastoral care as a parish gem. Work with the sick and housebound is seen and understood and a few others also see how good it is that this is linked to hospital visiting. The personal support of the p.p. is listed by a further 18 people.
- Our catechetical programmes and events are also highly valued with 20 people affirming their quality and importance. Another 28 see great value in the children's liturgies and in the general inclusion of children in parish activity. Another 14 specifically mention the school as being an important part of their parish life.
- Our worldwide mission is much appreciated with 11 mentioning our Ghana project and 6 more affirming our Traidcraft shop.
- Communication is mentioned by 16 as being of importance with a few people specifically naming the web, the directory and the magazine as being important features of this.

## **2. What needs to be developed in the community at this time?**

- The largest perceived need is in youth work with 57 people calling for comprehensive youth work strategies.
- The need to further enable the experience of community in our parish is seen by 35 people to be a priority as well. Many do not feel properly welcomed and many are looking for more social activity. Providing refreshments after masses at St. Thomas is proposed by 8 people as a possible means of building community there. A few people feel there is still a rift between the St. Peter's congregation and those at St. Thomas.
- The spirituality and prayer life of the parish would be the priority for 13 people with 6 others noting the lack of prayerfulness before and after mass. There are suggestions for more devotions, Latin, Benediction, more confessions and parish retreats.
- In terms of community activity, there are calls for more provision for people who are single, who are living outside regular marriages, or who are in young families, as well as the provision of OAP clubs and sports clubs, with 6 people seeking the upgrading of our hall to help facilitate this and another 6 addressing the issue of parking.
- Many feel that as a community we need greater outreach to the lapsed (10), to the local community, in work for Justice & Peace and in ecumenical affairs (6).
- Regarding liturgy and worship, some want more children's masses, some would like a wider variety of music, some want an end to children's liturgy, some want more art on display in Church and a few ask for missalettes to be supplied.
- There are calls for bible groups, more adult education, a parish-run nursery school, floral displays in church and the more in-depth use of the newsletter in education and communication.
- There are calls to re-start the bereavement group and to return to systematic home visiting.

### **3. How could we exchange our gifts with neighbouring parishes in our deanery?**

- Many suggest opening up our events, services, groups, training, programmes, Ghana project, etc for others to join us (24).
- Others feel we could support events and groups elsewhere with our attendance or even with financial help.
- Many feel that others could benefit simply by adopting our structures, strategies, organisation and methods.
- Only one person suggests sharing a priest with another parish.

### **4. What resources do we need to move our parish and deanery forward?**

- Many (21) are very specific in expressing a need for the diocese (to continue?!) to provide English-speaking, post Vatican II priests.
- There is a call by 12 for greater support for the p.p. in administering parish affairs (buildings, etc) and 8 people call on the diocese to provide the expertise of youth workers.
- The experience of “diocese” is felt by 15 to be insufficient with calls for a Kent diocese and calls for a Christian Education Centre in Kent – or at least more courses provided with better access for us.
- Others want the diocese to provide networks for sports and social activity and for disabled people.
- Many (10) ask for more frequent visits from Bishop John.
- A few people ask the diocese to provide more in the way of authoritative teaching on current affairs as well as other perspectives.
- A variety of views are also expressed about the Church in general needing to be more open to those not in regular marriage, to the consideration of women priests, married priests, to providing more deacons and to encouraging less clericalism with a decreasing dependence on clergy.

## **Rainham Catholic Church**

### **Theme 2: Reaching Out In Mission (204 contributions)**

#### **1. How do we reach out beyond the boundaries of our own Parish community to believers and non - believers?**

- A large number (79) recognise that being a strong friendly community with a good sense of belonging and welcome is the starting point to reaching out in mission.
- A further 42 identify ministries to the bereaved, the sick, the elderly, the poor, refugees and the third world as being crucial. Lay volunteers are seen to be important here. By our deeds shall we be known!
- Chaplaincies to schools, hospitals and prisons are identified by 17 as an important means of evangelisation.
- In various ways, good spiritual and moral leadership in our community is seen to be very important by 14 people. We must offer hope.
- Many people (19) see young people as a specific priority and it is suggested that involving them in ministry is important
- Family life is seen by 12 as being a means of reaching out.
- A number (14) mention that we need to provide good education about our faith to the lapsed and to non – believers.
- It is noted too (11) that we need to listen to what others have to say!

#### **2. How do we bring the good news to those without faith? How do we reach out in dialogue and collaboration to other Christians and to members of other religions?**

- Young people are again singled out as the group most in need of evangelisation with 49 people identifying their needs in participation, in education and in social activity.
- Many others (20) identify missionary work especially overseas work and our own Ghana project in particular, as our main priority and 8 more think work with the lapsed should be targeted.
- Many people (16) put their faith in the work of chaplaincies in schools, hospitals and so on.
- Our parish pastoral ministries to the sick, the elderly and so on are identified as important parts of our missionary outreach by 33 people.
- Many (9) feel that more parish social activity could draw people to the Church, 5 feel there should be more inter-parish activity and 8 feel there should be more inter-faith activity.
- Many see the need for ministers to carry the mission forward – more priests (3), deacons (3) and lay volunteers (14), always communicating to people that they are loved by God.

- The need to be more spiritual with more prayer, study, retreats and so on is seen by 23 as being much needed
- A wide variety of other concerns are also expressed: We should be more active politically (10), be involved with local charities (7), use the media more (8), undertake systematic house visiting (7), encourage parents to bring children to church (7), and much else besides.
- Some insist that the Church needs to stop excluding people from the sacraments.

### **3. How could we enable our parish to become a more welcoming home?**

- Many (64) identify the importance of providing both a welcome and a place for those who are divorced, single parents, lapsed people returning to the church, housebound, non-catholics in general and those in mixed marriages and we should provide extra on-going support for newcomers.
- Many others focus on young people – their needs in general and their liturgical needs (52)
- Many (35) identify the parish's pastoral work with the sick, bereaved etc as already being important in this area
- Others suggest further emphasis in our spiritual and sacramental celebration (20) and others in our social works (16)

### **4. Aware of the joys and sufferings both within our parish community and beyond it, how do we connect with those in greatest need?**

- Many (24) say we should pray for and recruit more people to ministry: priests, deacons, missionaries, helpers of various descriptions and young people especially.
- Prayer and prayer groups and pilgrimage are mentioned by 18.
- Visiting lapsed catholics is identified by 10 people as a priority.
- A number (26) suggest raising our profile in the media, in schools and in various other imaginative ways.
- A number feel that we should concentrate on what we already take on in our mission as a community. In various ways 28 people say we must become still better at being the Church we claim to be.
- Inter-faith and inter-church activity is prioritised by 13 people and a further 7 say that we need to be clear in our essential message that God loves us.

## **Rainham Catholic Church**

### **Theme 3: Facing The Future (217 contributions)**

#### **1. What fears do we have about the future?**

- The biggest concern about what might happen in the future, given the current shortage of priests is seen by 92 people to be the closure or “amalgamation” of churches or the sharing of priests and 7 fear having to travel distances to get to mass.
- While 14 people hope not to see married priests, 49 are against the ordination of women.
- Many (22) fear there might be fewer masses, more communion services, priests doing less chaplaincy work in schools, hospitals and so on, that there will be less access to priests and that priests will be pulled away from their basic spiritual duties.
- Some specifically object to seeing priestly roles taken up by lay people (9), or deacons, or paid church workers.
- There are concerns about recruiting priests from other countries who don't speak good English and who should be devoted to their own churches.
- There are various other concerns and fears about the Church compromising its teachings, about the decline of pastoral provision and about a lack of courage in facing up to the necessity to change.

#### **2. What forms of shared collaboration could be developed now at parish level or deanery level?**

- Administration is identified by 84 people as the area that should be lifted from the priest and shared at parish, deanery or diocesan levels.
- A further 32 people identify visiting the sick at hospital and home as suitable for collaborative ministry. Running sacramental programmes is also listed.
- While 22 call for more to be undertaken by deacons, equal numbers in various ways express feelings that the priest's role should not be shared out at all.

### **3. What special areas of pastoral provision could this deanery share?**

Most people (135) identify the value of local parishes sharing chaplaincies in hospitals, prisons, schools and also to the elderly. Marriage and funerals, seafarers, young offenders, cancer units and social events also get single mentions.

### **4. What forms of co-ordination or collaboration could be developed in our area if our own parish or a neighbouring parish did not have a parish priest?**

There are two groups of answers to this area of questioning:  
First, what should be done to ensure that each parish DOES have a priest?

- Married priests is the most popular solution with 78 people seeing this as the way ahead, with the ordination of women drawing the approval of 50 and the ordination of deacons as priests drawing 14.
- Recruiting priests from abroad is favoured by 30
- A further 15 insist that more priests must be recruited by any means including those who have left to marry to take up ministry once more.
- However, 74 people consider that the best solution is to close or “amalgamate” parishes, a rationalisation such as takes place in any organisation. Each maintained parish then still has its own priest.

Others prefer to consider what might be necessary to sustain the other option of keeping parishes open but without sufficient numbers of priests.

- Sharing priests is favoured by 17
- Many are prepared to face the necessity of there being fewer masses. This might simply mean less choice on a Sunday. It is recognised by 9 people that it might mean that Sunday mass isn't available in every parish every week (as is the case in many other countries). It might mean that we have to travel further with more emphasis on providing lifts to those without cars.
- Covering more responsibilities with deacons is favoured by 23, with 8 people calling for paid posts to be made available for lay people to take on the roles professionally as careers, and many others suggesting ways in which lay volunteers could share the burdens collaboratively. There are specific calls for women to be given greater responsibility.
- There are suggestions to liaise more closely with the Church of England and to use the internet more imaginatively.