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Pastoral Letter

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This letter is a personal note and without tears. In May, I celebrate my 40th year in Priesthood – a very happy milestone – and in 2009 I will be obliged to retire. Privilege has been my lot throughout life – in Family, Priesthood and as your Bishop. Thank you for your kindness and understanding.

My passion for Mission – making Christ known and loved - continues to grow, as you will see from the Mission Review document accompanying this letter – *'Fit for Mission? A Guide'*. I believe that we are tantalisingly near great new beginnings in the Church if only we capture something of the spirit of the Gospel – a deepening of Faith, coupled with confidence to know that Christ walks every step with us. He invites you and me – to cast out into the deep for without Him we will catch nothing.

What will this mean? Not only during Lent, but all of the time, it will mean change and this can be uncomfortable. We are being asked to look hard at those things in life that prevent us coming close to the Lord. Where should we invest our energies – in the passing and fleeting things of this world or in the eternal? Our parishes, too, must look to what encourages or impedes mission. Could it be that we are investing more in buildings, structures and all sorts of things rather than in people? How can we make ourselves fit for mission? I said that change is difficult – indeed it can be a Cross – but once accepted and when truly of the Lord, it brings great joy and a wonderful freedom.

I am looking to you for help in undertaking our Diocesan Mission Review which begins today – nothing could be more exciting and challenging. You and I need each other and together we need the Lord; all our efforts will be ineffectual without Him. Prayer is absolutely essential, enabling us to walk tall. With this in mind, I ask every parish and religious house to have special services (i.e. weekly Mission Mass, Reconciliation service, and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament) during the entire period of the Mission Review. In prayer we enter into a personal friendship with Christ which colours all other relationships. Just think how it affects marriage and family life, attitudes to people, work and life style, the hope it offers and what it says about priorities in life. What you will not find here is a great programme: rather it is a summons to radical change in each one of us, our parish and diocese making us all more open to the Lord.

There is one other thing: we need to join the Pilgrim People of God in the journey of faith and reconciliation that began on Ash Wednesday. Be ready to speak about it, especially to those close to you who seem to have wandered away from the family of the Church. How wonderful it would be for them to see in us the promise of an affectionate, merciful and joyful welcome home. The readings at our Lenten Mass today help with the Mission Review. They speak loudly of what God has already done for us – thus giving great hope. They call us, not only to repent of our sins, but to open our hearts to God and move forward in faith. Jesus' temptations emphasise the importance of fidelity to God's promptings in life.

Finally, dear friends, I thank Almighty God for all His goodness and mercy to me over these fruitful years as His Priest and latterly as Shepherd of the Diocese of Lancaster. In particular, I thank Him for the prayerful support and encouragement I have received from all of you, priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful, in my time among you. As we begin this time of planning for the future, be assured always of a very special place in my prayers - and please pray for me and for the success of our Mission Review.

Sincerest good wishes and prayers,

As ever in Christ our Lord,

Bishop of Lancaster

Preface

I wish it was possible to speak with each one of you personally to convey my excitement and commitment as we begin this diocesan-wide exercise to re-invigorate the life and mission of our Church. During the course of the year it is my hope to speak with as many of you as possible and hear your hopes and expectations.

The diocesan document - '*Fit for Mission? A Guide*' - has been written to assist us to reflect, discuss, and most importantly, to pray together about the many issues relating to our mission.

As you are aware, the Fit for Mission review does not take place in a vacuum. It is only right and proper that we acknowledge the work and effort that went into previous initiatives and reviews – *The National Pastoral Congress, In His Hands, the Pastoral Review, The Road Ahead, and New Start with Jesus*.

I imagine that some may be feeling disheartened and weary at the prospect of another exercise in missionary renewal and pastoral planning. Many of us have been labouring long and hard in the vineyard of the Lord, and have seen hopes and dreams meet with disappointment and heartache.

In answer to these understandable doubts and anxieties I believe that the *Fit for Mission* exercise is a new and fresh opportunity to proclaim with confidence the message of Christ in His Gospel.

It is my resolve to see this exercise through in its entirety, from the initial consultation to the final implementation, in the earnest hope that we will all experience tangible, practical benefits from our work, as well as sharing – God willing – spiritual fruits as yet unknown.

Let me leave you with these words from Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Oscar Romero:

'The Gospel is not a promise of easy success. It does not promise a comfortable life to anyone. It makes demands and, at the same time, it is a great promise...the promise of victory through faith for man, who is subject to many trials and setbacks....' Pope John Paul II.

'We Christians do not fail, for we bear the Spirit that raised up Christ'. Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Responses from individuals, families, parish pastoral councils, other parish groups and schools are most welcome and should be sent to Fr Robert Billing, Secretary, The Diocesan Review Team, The Pastoral Centre, Balmoral Road, Lancaster, LA1 3BT, or by email to mission.review@lancasterrcdiocese.org.uk

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Fit for Mission?

The Diocese of Lancaster reviews its Mission

What is the difference between a Catholic and someone who leads a life of little or no faith? This is an important question because it goes to the heart of our identity as a believing people called to mission. We must be clear about who we are called to be by God!

I am strongly of the belief that the difference lies in two realities basic to our Christian lives: first and foremost, it lies in our relationship with Jesus Christ, particularly in our celebration of the Eucharist and our proclamation of the Gospel; secondly, in the way our relationship with Jesus changes our relationships with others. If our Christian life is not about becoming, through grace, more and more like Jesus in our attitudes and behaviour what is the point of it all?

As St Paul puts it, *'You must be made new in mind and spirit, and put on the new nature of God's creating'* (Eph 4:23, 24).

The one thing necessary here is that we are honest and open with each other and with God. I must admit I ask myself these questions – Am I new in mind and spirit? Am I more and more like Jesus in my attitudes and behaviour to others? The truth of the matter is, I must answer 'No!' For the most part, I am not like Jesus, but I want to be!



As your Bishop I want to ask each one of you the same questions: Are you new in mind and spirit? Are you like Jesus in your attitudes and behaviour towards others in our Church and others around us?

The purpose of 'Fit for Mission?' is to enable us honestly and openly to find answers to the following three questions:

How do I change and become the person God calls me to be?

How do we change our parishes so we become more and more the people God calls us to be?

How do we change our diocese, especially our structures, so we become the communion God calls us to be?

Section One. How do I change and become the person God calls me to be?

1. When Jesus comes will He find faith in our diocese?

'When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?' (Luke 18:8).

Here is a simple statistic that shows the reason why together we must ask the question 'Are we fit for mission?' According to the press in just 3 years the Catholic Church in the UK lost at least 100,000 regular Mass goers! Each person who has left the active practise of their faith will have unique, individual reasons for doing so.

I want to focus on what I think are two underlying reasons for this state of affairs from among the complexity of factors responsible for Catholics lapsing, and they are to do with Power and Promise.

Do we still believe in the power of prayer?



We live in a culture that honours and seeks power above all else! It taps into our natural and good desire for pleasure, recognition, and personal fulfillment. Hence the attractiveness of the power of money, sex, celebrity, violence, the power of social position and influence. In the face of such power it is easy to slip into a way of thinking and making decisions 'as if Christ did not really exist!' (*Ecclesia in Europa*, 26).

But as Christians we can only have one true source of power, that is the power of prayer. Jesus calls us to renounce the misuse of money, sex, celebrity, violence, social position, and influence, so we can depend totally on the Father through the Holy Spirit

'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened (Luke 11:9-10).

Could it be that we become weak and lifeless because we have forgotten the power of prayer and have not been drawing on the Scriptures to help us?

I firmly believe that the strength and vitality of the Church is dependent on the strength of our conviction that true prayer can change lives in unexpected ways. We have to hold onto this hope in the face of the mystery of unanswered prayer, remembering that Jesus promises the Father's gift of the *'the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'* (Lk 11:13).

Everytime we truly pray for health in the face of sickness, or peace in the face of violence, or love in the face of hate – through the power of grace – we are making the Kingdom of God present – at that moment – in our minds and hearts, and communities. The sign of the Kingdom among us is the mysterious and wonderful working of God's power. For that moment the world is as the Father intends – a world shaped by Faith, Hope, and Charity, and anything is possible!



Do we still believe in the promises of Christ?

We live in a culture that uses promises to excite our desire for things, keep us distracted, and leave us dissatisfied, so that we want more! We are beings orientated to Promise – our future fulfilment in the vision of God. The drama of salvation is the unfolding of God's promises to Israel and each one of us. Our very experience is transformed by God's promises. Excesses of consumer capitalism exploit our orientation to the future.

Is it any wonder that we live in an increasingly angry and discontented society? It is all too common to witness people reduced to rage and indignant protest at the slightest frustration of their will or challenge to their expectations!

How many of us Christians live lives dedicated to attaining these material promises, forgetting the spiritual promises of Christ? As a result, the spirit of rage and discontent has even invaded our Church, upsetting the peace and unity

that are the signs of true Christian love. No level of the church has remained untouched by this vexatious spirit, and it is poisoning our communion!

I think we have allowed ourselves at times to be divided by an adversarial attitude! How can we who truly love the Church founded by Christ be divided into factions— traditional and liberal, conservative and progressive, loyal and dissenting! We are not Parliament! We are the People of God, the Body of Christ – the Catholic Church sharing unity in diversity!

I am convinced that this fragmented state of affairs has arisen among us because we have forgotten or lack faith in the promises of Christ! Instead of Christ being at the centre of our lives, we are all in danger of putting ego in His place!

Desire, Devotion and Delight

If our lives are founded on the promises of Christ, instead of being caught up in the cycle of desire, distraction, and dissatisfaction, we will be caught up in the grace of desire, devotion, and delight! It is only the desire for God, truly and fully realised through loving devotion to Jesus, and experienced as growing wonder and delight, that completely fulfils our minds and hearts.

Therefore, we must be more confident in challenging excessive consumer capitalism, and its illusory promises, with the reality of Christ's promises experienced through the rhythms of desire, devotion and delight.

It will be enough to remind ourselves of just a few of Christ's promises:

Any one who loves Me will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We shall come to him and make a home in him

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Peace I bequeath to you, My own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is My gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. (John 14:23, 26 -27).

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20).

Christ's greatest promise – the Eucharist!



I am very much aware of the honour and privilege that we priests share when we make present Christ's greatest promise through praying the Mass, especially the words of consecration, *'This is My Body. This is My Blood.'*

To hold in our hands the sacramental signs of the Body and Blood of Jesus given out of love for the people of God is surely the heart of our priestly lives, and the lives of our communities.

This is why I don't understand how people can leave the Church if they truly believe the promise of Christ to be really present under the appearance of bread and wine! To my mind it seems the only reason why people ultimately leave the practise of their faith is because they don't have a strong enough belief that Jesus gives His Body and Blood to them in the Eucharist! This lack of faith underscores the vital importance of sound Eucharistic catechesis adapted to the different stages of people's faith formation.

For me, Archbishop Oscar Romero's words capture something of the transforming power of this greatest of Christ's promises:

'When we leave Mass, we ought to go out the way Moses descended Mount Sinai: with his face shining, with his heart brave and strong to face the world's difficulties'.



The five minute commit!

Prayer is a very real force for change! To this end, I ask each one of you to join me in making the following solemn commitment – every day to pray an additional five minutes at least for the intentions of the 'Fit for Mission' review:

Father, you call us to share the power and promises of your Son, Jesus Christ. May we become a holy people so alive in the Spirit of loving kindness and justice that we change the world according to Your will and purpose.

Lord Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, give me the wisdom to change so that I become the Apostle the Father calls me to be.

Lord Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, give my parish the courage to change so that we become the people the Father calls us to be.

Lord Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, give our diocese the holiness to change so that we all become the mystical body the Father calls us to be.

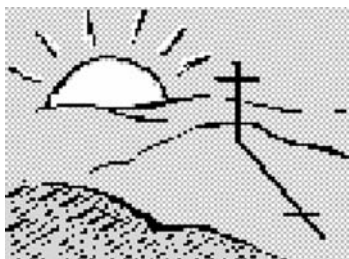
We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Let these intentions become the desire of our intercessions, the subject of our meditation, and the longing of our contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament. I am certain that if this prayer becomes the heartfelt desire of all Catholics in our diocese, a holy power will be released that will transform, heal, and re-invigorate each one of us and the way we proclaim the Gospel by our prayer, by how we live and by what we say and do. At the very heart of Mission is the Spirit of Christ.

Strengthening what remains!

Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death. Rev 3:2

It has been predicted from a study of the pattern of church attendance over the past 100 years that if trends continue there will be virtually no Christian institutional presence in Britain by the year 2050 (*David Hay, The Biology of the Human Spirit*). In 1994 Mass attendance in the diocese was 38,000, falling to 23,900 by 2006.



We must wake up to the fact that the forces of dissolution are at work again in this country, resulting in a 'silent apostasy' (*Ecclesia Europa*, 9) as many Catholics walk away from the Church.

Once before in history a ruling elite imposed dissolution on the Catholic Church, this time widespread social and cultural forces of dissolution are being disseminated by some in the political establishment, the media, and education, seen in their one-sided promotion of secular humanism against religion.

One has only to think of the promotion of sensational films that distort history, polemical documentaries that pretend impartiality, and blatantly anti-Catholic fiction and autobiography 'to see the way the wind is blowing!' And in this prevailing wind many a flickering flame of faith is being blown out, among young and old alike!

While we welcome open and frank debate about the claims of Jesus Christ, we must challenge those who promote an exaggerated caricature or even a wilful misrepresentation of the truth out of hostility towards Christianity and the Catholic Church.

The times in which we live call on us all to strengthen our prophetic witness, through becoming a voice for the voiceless. We must be strong to protect the weak and the vulnerable. The dignity and rights of the most vulnerable are being threatened or even overturned. If for nothing else, we must become fit for mission for their sake!

What does this mean in practical terms? It means three things:

Each one of us must change and become the person God calls us to be.

Each one of our parishes must change so that we become more and more the people God calls us to be.

Our diocese must change so that we become the communion God calls us to be.

2. Fit for Mission? Gathered and sent

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit". (John 20: 21-22)

As I consider the challenges and opportunities facing our diocese I am struck by the thought that everytime we pray the creed at Mass, we say, 'I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church'. It is the fourth mark of the Church that is uppermost in my mind as we begin our 'Fit for Mission' review – the apostolic nature of the Church.

What is an Apostle? He or she is someone gathered together with others chosen by the Lord to serve others through the gift of faith, the Gospel and the heavenly gifts of the sacraments, by being sent out to proclaim the 'loving kindness of the heart of our God' (Lk 1:78).

These are the two rhythms of our Christian apostleship – *to be gathered and sent*.

We are all called together by the Risen Lord

Having prayed to His Father, Jesus gathered to Himself the Twelve 'to be with Him, and to be sent out to proclaim the Good News' (Mk 3:14). What strikes me as important here is that first and foremost Jesus called the Twelve to 'be' with Him. It was through their intense, personal friendship with the Lord, and each other, that these twelve ordinary men became Apostles, who 'handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did' (*Dei Verbum* 7).

In the same way, the Risen Lord gathers us to Himself to 'be' with Him and each other in the intense friendship of the Eucharist. It is through our faithful and active participation in the sacrifice of the Mass that each one of us also learns from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He does through giving us His Sacred Body and Precious Blood. By so doing, Jesus gently draws us to gather around His Cross, so that we are forged in the divine furnace of self-giving love and radiate its heat to others.

It is only through being with the Lord in the Eucharist that we can become apostles sent out to proclaim the Gospel.



We all share in apostleship through baptism

When praying the creed we are saying that we believe that each one of us is an apostle sent out into the world, as Jesus was sent by his Father. We receive a Power, a Truth, and a Mission that is not of human origin but is given to us by the Father, through the

Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Apostleship is a work of grace that enables us to do what we cannot do on our own, but only through the power of the Holy Spirit: *"Receive the Holy Spirit"*.

The Lord continues to send out apostles to proclaim the Word of God, to celebrate the sacraments, and to exercise the ministry of love, forgiveness, and solidarity. Apostleship is the way Christ continues to share his divine life, love, and teaching with us. Each one of us is called to share in this apostolate.

The Diocese is apostolic

My role as a successor to the Apostles is to enable you to realise your own apostolic calling. This is why I am asking you to join me in this review of our mission.

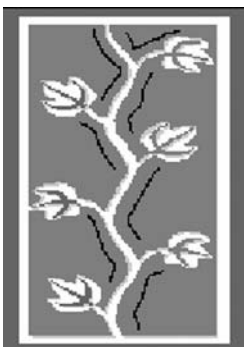
Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord will show us how to read the signs of the times and guide us in the decisions we need to take together in order to carry out the mission entrusted to us as apostles. Through God's providence, each one of us has been sent here to this place and at this time with the gifts needed to proclaim the Gospel to our community. All that is needed is generosity of spirit and a willingness to work together.

3. The promise of being a people - gathered and sent.

I think it is essential that we allow the power and the promise contained in Scripture and Tradition to enlighten the need for change that faces each one of us.

A people gathered around Christ

It strikes me as essential to keep in mind from the outset that we do not plan a re-structuring of the diocese for mission or implement change like a business or a secular organisation. As a people gathered around the Risen Lord, prayer must be the beginning and end of our Mission Review, because without Christ, we can do nothing:



'I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15:5).

This Eucharistic image of Christ as 'the vine', and ourselves as 'His branches', points us to the truth of the centrality of Christ in the life of the Church. Wherever he is not central there is need for change!

In the prayers of our Eucharistic liturgy we find all essential Church teachings and a basic frame of reference for dealing with the questions and changes of Church life. Reflecting on the dynamics of the Eucharist - gathered together and sent out into the world, we arrive at several insights:

- The sacrifice of the Eucharist is the pre-eminent way we express in our lives, and show to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1). Our encounter with Christ's self-giving love in the Eucharist comes to fruition in lives of self-giving service to others, particularly the poor.
- The Church was born of the dying and rising of Christ (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 3). Therefore, we live out the dying and rising in our communities in a special way when we go through transformations and changes in the life and structures of our communities.
- The Eucharist is both the source and the summit of our mission since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 22).
- 'Eucharistic communion includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented' (*Deus Caritas Est* 14).

A people sent out into the world



Henri de Lubac, the great French priest and theologian, once wrote that the grace of Catholicism is not given to us by the Lord for ourselves alone, but for those who do not yet possess it! And I think this is the key to how we must look at the Mission Review. We cannot remain content to keep the grace of Catholicism to ourselves, but must give it away – with a generosity like Our Lord's – to those who do not possess it.

Our mission is an expression of the generous and extravagant love of God, '*who so loved the world that he gave his only Son*' (John 3:16). Mission is the action of God who gives Himself away in love, expressed in the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the will of God the Father (Ad Gentes 2).

It is vital to the life of the diocese that we all realise that mission is essential to the nature of the Church.

The 20th century witnessed the dissemination of wonderful teaching documents on the role of mission in the life of the Church, such as the Second Vatican Council's Ad Gentes, Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*.

This deepening of the Church's understanding of mission drew on the great missionary endeavours of the Church in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania.

A number of insights can be drawn from these documents that will enrich our 'Fit for Mission' review:

- It is only through sharing in the Spirit of Christ that we can fulfil our missionary mandate (*Mt 28:18-20*). The Holy Spirit gives life – soul-like – to our Diocesan Church, instilling in our hearts the same mission spirit which impelled Christ Himself (*Ad Gentes, 2*).
- Together, prompted by the Holy Spirit, we must walk in the same path on which Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which death He came forth a victor by His resurrection... Thus it is plain that missionary activity wells up from the Church's inner nature and spreads abroad her saving Faith (*Ad Gentes, 5*).
- Mission is not an optional extra but is our vocation as the People of God, a duty given us by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is a question of people's salvation (*Evangelii Nuntiandi 5*).
- Our faith is strengthened when it is given to others! Our faith is also strengthened when we receive from others! Missionary activity will renew our Church, revitalise our faith and Christian identity, and offer fresh enthusiasm and new incentive (*Redemptoris Missio*).

I am very aware of the fact that in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world we must start from a realistic understanding of the conditions of the society and culture of which we are part. There are many obstacles to our mission both within the Catholic community and within wider society.

Obstacles within our own community



As a community we must honestly acknowledge that at times Christians themselves conceal rather than reveal the 'authentic face of God and religion' by not living according to the Gospel, by failing to hold the true teachings of the Church, and by serious deficiencies in religious, moral or social life (*Gaudium et Spes 19*).

Also we need to ask ourselves to what extent are we in the Church influenced by the climate of secularism, with its doubt, scepticism, and pessimism? Do we have a spirit of self-sufficiency, rather than a spirit of openness to our continual need for God and his grace and truth?

Obstacles within our society

We must also address with faith and mercy the many obstacles to hearing the Gospel that exist in contemporary society. Pope Benedict XVI identifies the root cause of all the problems in our society as *'forgetfulness of God'*. Increasingly people are living their lives forgetful of God and therefore divorced from the great truths of Christianity. And this forgetfulness is spreading.

You may have noticed, as I have, that it has recently become common for some people to challenge our right to proclaim the Gospel in public, out of a desire to restrict religious freedom. We must not allow our faith to be restricted to the private sphere, because as St Paul puts it, *'Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!'* (1 Cor 9:16).

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor is surely right when he says that we now live in a culture that is radically breaking from Christianity and the 'moral and religious traditions of humanity'. Many people have a supermarket attitude to morality and religion, picking and choosing whatever takes their fancy at the time. This lack of any sense of objective truth makes it very difficult to engage with them about Christianity's claims to truth.

Therefore, our mission as the whole people of God – priests, deacons, religious and laity – is to become *'living reminders'* of the Good News of the love and truth of God.

We must not be discouraged by obstacles to our mission, but rather take to heart St Paul's advice to St. Timothy, *'Proclaim the message, be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable. Refute falsehood, correct error, give encouragement – but do all with patience and with care to instruct'* (2 Tim 4:2).

We do not simply, or even mainly, proclaim God's message by what we say but by how we live and our commitment to God and to others. Cardinal Newman advised, *'that we preach Jesus without preaching, not by words but by our example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what we do, the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear to You'*.

4. At your word I will let down the nets!

"Master, we worked hard all night long but have caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets". And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets were beginning to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them'. Luke 5:5-6.



On 25 May 2007 I will have been 40 years a priest and over those years I know how hard priests, deacons, religious and lay people have worked in living and proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and undertaking the ministry of charity, justice and peace. It is a hard thing to ask you to confront with me the situation facing our diocese, for sometimes it does feel that *'we worked hard all night long but have caught nothing!'*

Let us take courage from the Apostle Peter's total act of faith in the Lord, and say with Him, as today's apostles, *'At your word I will let down the nets!'* Only one thing is necessary – faith in the word of the Lord which gathers us together and sends us out into the world!

Section Two. How do we change our parishes so that we become the people God calls us to be?

1. Hard Talk!

I want to invite you all to join me in considering a number of disputed questions that we urgently need to answer for the well being and vitality of our local church. The longer we continue to repress these questions, the more we will lose our strength and our ability to proclaim the Gospel.

Are we too cosy with the Gospel, keeping it to ourselves?

There is always the danger that we try to restrict the Gospel to being a cosy fire to warm ourselves, particularly when we're experiencing the Church in a time of winter. We should remember that Jesus said, *'I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze!'* (Luke 12: 49). Our heartfelt prayer must be to share Jesus' desire to bring the fire of God's love to the whole world - radiated out from ourselves and our communities. Have we accepted the widespread attitude that religion is a private matter? Are we embarrassed to live differently because of the standards and values of our faith? Are we embarrassed to talk about our faith to others, even members of our own families? Why are we embarrassed to talk about God's love for us and our love for God? What are the things that hold us back from evangelising our families, parishes, schools, and wider communities?

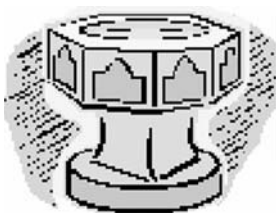


At the grass roots are we still allergic to ecumenism?

We have had dialogue with other churches and ecclesial communities since the 1960's at an institutional level, particularly with the Church of England and the Free churches. But at the local level – except for a few notable exceptions – do we remain strangers? Why is this? Is it still the working out of historical alienation? Is it to do with class? Is it because the things we disagree about are so fundamental, they will always divide us from each other? Is it that we can't be bothered to find ways of working with other Christians in order together to bring Christ's love to our world? What can we do next to break through this *impasse*? Do we need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to openly share with other Christians all our unspoken wounds?

It is only through being honest and frank with each other that we can allow Jesus' prayer to become a reality, *'Holy Father, protect them in Your name that You have given Me, so that they may be one, as We are one'* (John 17:11).

Are we cheapening our sacraments?



It is an undeniable fact that due to the success and popularity of our schools many families are presenting their children for the sacraments of initiation to ensure admission, not as an expression of a desire to raise their children in the faith. Many request baptism, communion, confirmation, and marriage in the Church as a rite of passage ceremony rather than an expression of faith. There is an unspoken complicity between them and us. At most, we see it as an opportunity to once more try and catechise those who don't practise the faith. However, if we don't value our sacraments, why should we be surprised if they don't!

How do we find a way of detaching the sacraments from admission to our schools? Is it possible? Is it a fact that we offer the sacraments to those families who have not yet been evangelised? Accepting that the sacraments require the response of faith, how do we welcome the non-practising without undermining the meaning of the sacraments? How do we attempt to re-engage those who only retain a social or cultural attachment to the Church? How can we re-iterate that faith and commitment are absolutely necessary for the celebration of the sacraments? How would you react to a diocesan policy where the age for First Communion is 8+ and Confirmation 16+?

How do we move beyond warm words about the role of women in the Church?

We have had many moving, even beautiful statements on the role of women in the Church, but we remain a pre-dominantly male institution. It is time we acknowledged that the life of the Church is dependent on the commitment and gifts of women, who represent more than 60% of the Church's voluntary workers.



How do we move beyond words, and take positive action? Accepting that the question of the ordination of women is not open to us, what options can we consider? It is surely time to challenge any unquestioned habits or subconscious prejudices that are blocking the role of women in our parishes and diocese. How many women chair parish councils or deanery pastoral councils? How can groups such as *Women Together in the Diocese of Lancaster*, *the Catholic Women's League* and *the Union of Catholic Mothers* help us further promote the role of women? What do women religious and catechists have to tell us about the role of women in the Church, from their experience of pastoral work and catechesis in the diocese?

Have we remained obedient to the truth safeguarded by the teaching office of the Church?



Since the earliest times the English Church was renowned for her loyalty and obedience to the Successor of St Peter, due to our loving memory of the personal missionary interest of St Gregory the Great. Loyalty and obedience to the Pope was a particular charism of the English Church, that saw us through the penal times, exemplified by our Lancashire and Cumbrian martyrs. I am sure that 'obedience to the truth' is vital for the well being and harmony of our diocese:

'Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart' (1 Peter 1:22).

At all levels of the church, have we remained faithful to the Petrine office? Do we actively study and disseminate the teachings of the Church? Do we promote the Church's teaching on life issues, such as birth control, IVF, and euthanasia? Do we base our catechesis on *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*? Do we actively engage with the Church's social teaching, commonly known as the 'best kept secret'?

How do we bring healing to the victims of sexual abuse?

The whole issue of the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults is very painful. It fills me with such sadness that adults, including some priests, religious, and lay workers, have inflicted such physical and psychological harm on children.

Pope Benedict reminds the Church that is important to:

Establish the truth of what happened in the past, to take whatever steps are necessary to prevent it from occurring again, to ensure that the principles of justice are fully respected and, above all, to bring healing to the victims and to all those affected by these egregious crimes.

How do we care for those suffering the wounds of sexual abuse? Are we ready to hear their accounts of betrayal and pain?

Another tragedy is that in the current climate, the claims of natural justice are sometimes being ignored and even the accusation of sexual abuse leads some to assume the defendant is guilty. Are we unreservedly accepting those who have been falsely accused of sex abuse back into our community? How do we support those members of our community who are accused of sex crimes, while they await trial? How do we help in the rehabilitation and healing of perpetrators, while at the same time keeping the safety of children paramount?

We must also acknowledge that this scandal has led many to turn away from the Church and lapse from the practise of their faith.

Do we challenge the rise of racism in our community?

It has been an occasion of great sadness and concern to me to see the increasing influence of racist politics in Northern England, particularly seen in the rise of the British National Party. As the Church, have we joined our fellow Christians in challenging racist attitudes and prejudice in our own communities? How do we actively and visibly integrate people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds into our own parishes? Do we root out racism in our own hearts, remembering St Paul's words, *'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'* (Galatians 3:28). How do we heal the fear that is at the core of race hate?

Do we see Jews and Muslims as our fellow brothers and sisters who acknowledge Abraham as our father in faith?

The rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia is increasingly a worry to me! What can we do as Christians to bring the faith communities together? Do we harbour any anti-Semitism or Islamophobia in our hearts? Do we seek to understand and appreciate what is 'true and holy' (*Nostra Aetate 2*) in the other major world religions?

I recommend that we find new ways of working with *Churches together in Cumbria/Churches together in Lancashire* on inter-faith matters. Active dialogue with all Faith groups is absolutely essential - this is sometimes made easy because of the presence of Muslim, Hindu and Bahai children in our schools.

Are our sights so set on the things of Heaven, that we forget the Earth?



All of us are aware at some level that the seasons are out of kilter, and many feel uneasy about the threat of Global Warming. It is easy to feel so overwhelmed by the enormity of a problem effecting the whole planet, that we shrug our shoulders and hope someone else will find a solution. Pope John Paul II said,

'We must all learn to approach the environmental question with solid ethical convictions involving responsibility, self-control, justice, and fraternal love. For believers, this outlook springs directly from their relationship to God the Creator of all that exists.' (John Paul II to Scientists, 1993)

Are we so busy with 'church' business that we don't give ourselves time to think about the 'bigger' moral picture? What is the carbon footprint of your home and parish? The carbon footprint is a measure of our impact on the environment. We cannot stand aloof from the issues of global warming which demand an immediate response!

Is justice and peace still the Cinderella of Catholic life and practise?

In the early church liturgy was seen as both the worship of God and practical concern for the poor. Both were essential for the authentic practice of Christian discipleship. However, over time the two have become detached, with priority being given to sacramental life.

Scripture makes it clear that love of God and love of people, expressed through a commitment to justice, are inextricably linked together (Amos 5: 21-22). Jesus' fundamental option for the poor is not an optional extra for us, but must be as important to us as going to Mass:

'He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"' (Luke 4:17-19).

There are so many issues of justice and peace to consider, which are the subject of wonderful reflections in the Church's social documents, such as *Gaudium et Spes*, John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus*, and Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas est*.

It is the tragedy of the 21st century that violence and war remains an instrument of politics between States and peoples. It is as true now as it has been over 2000 years, that it is the innocent who suffer the most, through famine,

forced-migration, and genocide. In the light of this, I feel we must look at one issue of justice and peace in particular – have we turned a blind eye to the presence of the arms trade in our diocese? The question of challenging the arms trade poses a dilemma for our diocese, because I am very aware that companies such as BAE systems are vital to our economic well being, providing employment for many members of our community.



However, we must question the morality of the arms trade, as it blights the lives of so many around the world, particularly the poorest. How do we begin to engage the question of diversification of industry, so the North West is not dependent on the arms trade? How do we work for nuclear disarmament, while preserving the economic well being of places like Barrow?

Are we acquiescing to the killing of the unborn child in our country?



Since the Abortion Act of 1967, over 5 million children have been killed in the womb. Even to raise the question of the morality of this gravest of injustices is enough to incur the anger and condemnation of powerful sections of our society. As a consequence, have we become too passive and silent to effectively protest this injustice that cries to heaven? Do we support politicians and others who want to reform the abortion laws of this country, irrespective of our party allegiance? It is important to recall the words of Pope John Paul II in this regard,

'Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimise. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection.' (Evangelium Vitae, 73).

As long as our country allows the killing of the unborn child, we will continue to witness the collapse of moral life, particularly among families. Therefore, I commend every member of our diocese who is involved in peaceful and prayerful witness against the crime of abortion in Lancashire and Cumbria. I also ask our parishes to support Catholic organisations, such as Life groups, that provide counselling, advice, support, and hospitality to women considering abortion.

2. How do people see us? An examination of conscience

On the first Sunday of the first Lent of the third millennium Pope John Paul II led the Church in an extraordinary and unprecedented examination of conscience:

'In this year of mercy the Church, strong in the holiness which she receives from her Lord, should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters. Let us forgive and ask forgiveness!'

In the same spirit, I invite you to join me in an equally profound examination of conscience:

- ***Is the holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ visible in me? Do I live a life worthy of someone who is called to be part of the Body of Christ?***
- ***Are we a Caring Church known for our compassion, loving-kindness, and forgiveness?***
- ***Are we a Courageous Church known for our understanding, wisdom, and obedience to the truth?***
- ***Are we a Servant Church known for looking outwards to the needs of others, particularly the poor?***
- ***Are we a Humble Church known for our openness to all that is good and creative in our society?***
- ***Are we a Voice for the Voiceless, a Strength for the Weak, a Refuge for the Vulnerable?***
- ***Are we aware of our own sinfulness? Do we avail of the outpouring of God's mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?***
- ***Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, do we run towards those returning home, our arms outstretched in welcome, or do we stand aloof in judgement like the elder brother?***

What do we do next?

Individuals, Parishes, and Deaneries should promote prayer and discussion on the *Hard Talk* questions. New questions and issues may emerge from your reflections. These will help shape your parish and deanery mission priorities when you come to consider the specific needs of your community.

3. Responding to the needs of our community

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money..." Luke 9: 1-3.

A number of important priorities have become apparent to me through my consultation with priests and people as your Bishop over the past five years. I will divide them under the three criteria – Sacramental, Mission and Sustainable.

IMPORTANT! *Individuals and parishes should prioritise their responses to the many important issues presented for consideration. Your response will depend on time-pressures, manpower, and available skills. It will not be possible to action every point at the same time. Collaborative ministry between clergy and laity is essential, as we all have – through God's providence – the different gifts and skills necessary for the challenges ahead. Also, it is vital that collaboration between parishes must be encouraged and fostered. This is no longer just an option, it is a necessity!*



As we study the concrete reality of our parishes, schools and other institutions within our deaneries, three criteria will help us discern the sacramental and missionary vitality of our communities:

- A. **Sacramental:** How are we gathering together around the Lord? Are we celebrating the Mass, and other sacraments well? Do we put the necessary effort into preparing for the celebration of the sacraments?
- B. **Mission:** Are we accepting the Lord's invitation to go out into the world? Do we have a parish strategy for evangelisation and catechesis? Have we identified the needs of our local community? How are we responding to the needs of the socially deprived, older people, migrants, the lonely? What are the impediments to mission in our parish?
- C. **Sustainable:** Looking at how we are gathered and sent by the Lord, is our parish sustainable in its present shape to deliver both aspects of the Church's mission? Would we be better working with another parish/parishes to give us the confidence to create a much stronger missionary presence in our local community? What tasks are better managed and run at our local deanery level?

A. SACRAMENTS. Jesus calls us together to give us power and authority to serve.

Luke (9:1-3) tells us that we are given the power and authority of apostles to serve the needs of others, and enable them to grow 'in the Spirit'.

1. Fostering Leadership

Jesus calls us together as the Church to give us the power and authority to teach, reconcile, and heal in His name. Though we all have a share in Jesus' power and authority, it is vital we develop leaders in the many different areas of work and ministry required for the current and future needs of the Church. One of the gifts of the Second Vatican Council has been the encouragement of lay leadership and the development of ministries in the Church.



Very rarely is anyone born a leader, leadership usually emerges according to needs and as people develop their baptismal gifts. Therefore, we need to identify, train, and encourage lay men and women for roles of active leadership in all aspects of Church and civic life. Obviously, too, leadership formation includes fostering vocations to the priesthood, permanent diaconate, and consecrated life.

The accredited *Course for Parish Catechists* run jointly between *the Education Centre* and *Maryvale* is now a major diocesan commitment towards genuine lay formation and leadership.

2. Compelling Witnesses

If we are to be compelling witnesses and voices of faith to others, we need renewed catechetical formation for people of all ages. All parishes – priests and people – should take greater advantage of catechetical opportunities at times of preparation for the sacraments of baptism, reconciliation, first communion, confirmation, marriage, and funerals. I particularly commend the invaluable work and tireless commitment of our catechists.

3. Deepening Leadership

Receiving the power and authority of Jesus through Holy Orders is a great privilege. Our calling of others to leadership will only be credible and compelling to the extent we re-commit ourselves to active and creative leadership. Toward this end, I ask that all priests and deacons to commit themselves to ongoing personal, theological, spiritual and pastoral formation, as well as strengthening their skills in management. Ever evolving needs require ever-new skills.

4. Christian Responsibility

Jesus gives us a share in His power and authority so that we can serve other's needs, *'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve'* (Mark 10:45). This is why it is so important for each parish and deanery to have a Pastoral Council that serves as a collaborative forum for such deliberations under the Spirit's guidance. It is important to thankfully acknowledge those who give up their valuable time to serve the Church on the various councils and committees that support the life of our parishes and diocese. I encourage others to join in this important work.

5. Fostering Vocations

We can be sure that Jesus is calling men and women to a special share in His power and authority for service. For the sake of future leaders in the Church, *the ministry of fostering vocations* needs to be a major theme of every parish. I ask that prayer for vocations be a regular part of our liturgies and that once a year, every parish dedicate its weekend liturgies to this hugely important theme and seek to identify by name potential candidates for ministerial priesthood, diaconate and/or consecrated life.

6. Authentic Liturgy

Good liturgy is as important to the life of the Church as air is to a living body. Liturgy is the way given us by God to enable us to share in the life of God, and hear Him speak in love to us as friends (John 15:14-15). Liturgy is the way God lives among us, and invites and enables us to enter into fellowship with Him.

In light of the importance of gathering around the Lord in the Eucharist, we must be ever faithful to our identity and tradition, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist and Sacraments. Therefore, I ask all priests to renew their commitment to the well-prepared, reflective and uplifting celebration of the Mass, with the full participation of their people, and all deacons to renew their commitment to assist, in full compliance with the revised *'General Instruction of the Roman Missal'* and the *'Instruction on the Eucharist.'*

I want to thank all our altar servers, the Guild of St Stephen, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, readers, sacristans, choirs, musicians, and many others for their commitment to serving the liturgy. May I encourage others to join them in this great service of the Lord.



B. MISSION. Jesus sends us out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal.

Luke (9:1-3) tells us that Jesus sends us out as his apostles to bring the healing of the Good News.

1. Mission with Families

Family life ministry is vital to all of us. Pope John Paul II had a keen sense of the fundamental value of the family, 'As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.' Therefore, it is essential that we all foster the well being of marriage and the family.

We must strengthen our catechesis of the sacramentality of marriage, and the understanding that the married couple participate in a unique way in the life of Christ and His Bride, the Church. Familiarity with Pope John Paul's beautiful 'theology of the body' will help here.



In family life we can see the full glory of the gospel teaching on heterosexuality. The physical and spiritual communion of husband and wife in sacramental marriage is the Image of God, fully revealed in the procreation of children. Also, the chastity of married love and the chastity of celibacy are put before us as different aspects of the God who dwells among us. It is within the context of marriage and family that the Church's teaching on homosexuality can be understood.

Furthermore, we have much to learn from the experience and spirituality of married couples. For instance, the institutional church needs to learn about the healing, sustaining and life-giving nature of love from married couples.

I encourage each parish to find ways of promoting and deepening prayer in the family. Through their example and family prayer, parents guide their children on the path to Christian maturity, salvation, and holiness (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

To this end, I hope that all parishes or deaneries have set up marriage preparation courses that draw on the experience of married couples. I strongly recommend that these courses draw on the services of Catholic agencies such as *Marriage Care* in the preparation of couples for marriage.

Every parish should be especially sensitive to the needs of young couples and families. Our *Marriage and Family Life Commission* is working hard to animate local support and prayer for families and married couples. Current networks of support groups need to be sustained, strengthened and expanded.

2. Mission with Youth

Youth ministry is often the highest priority consistently mentioned by parishes as I go around the Diocese. Young people – whether they know it or not – need the meaning and purpose that only comes through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. We very much need the enthusiasm, creativity, and passion for life that young people bring to the Church.

A comprehensive approach is recommended in my recent *Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Lancaster (2006)*, that incorporates prayer and service, as well as catechesis and social gatherings as important elements of youth work.

Engaging youth as active participants and leaders requires diverse approaches given the needs of urban, rural, and suburban youth. Youth leaders urgently need to be trained and supported at the parish and deanery setting, and be enabled to play a full, active and responsible role in the life of our parishes. I recommend that parishes draw on the guidance of our Diocesan Youth Officer.



I am very aware of the tireless and creative work of some priests, deacons and lay women and men working with youth. May I encourage more to join them in this invaluable mission. As a diocese, we have the wonderful resources of two youth retreat centres at Castlerigg and Brettagh Holt, with their dedicated youth teams. I encourage all our schools and parishes to use their services.

3. The New Evangelisation

At the heart of our life as the Church is the call to find new and creative ways of bringing men and women to know Jesus as Lord through openness to the Spirit and engaging the culture of our day. This means that we need to foster and encourage those among us who have the talent and creative skills to use music, art, film, drama, and the web to proclaim the life giving power of the Gospel. I especially appeal to young people to use their energy and enthusiasm in this New Evangelisation.

A powerful resource for our mission of communicating the faith and life of the Church is the monthly publication of the Diocesan newspaper *'The Voice'* (also online), *'Voicextra'* email services, parish bulletins, and our Diocesan Web site.

4. Mission with Schools

For a great many of our families, the only contact they have with the Church is through their children's attendance at our schools. All our Primary and Secondary schools should be at the cutting edge of the 'New Evangelisation' at every level. Without it how can they claim the name of 'Catholic'? Therefore, the priority of mission must be at the heart of the school ethos. Every school must have a strong sense of its Catholic identity. It is important that opportunities for prayer, evangelisation, and catechesis are a regular part of school life. To this end, mutual collaboration between parish and school is essential. I recommend to your attention in this regard my document, *Chaplaincy in Catholic Schools (2006)* from which this passage comes:

'The teaching and living out of Gospel values is central to the special nature of Catholic schools. This calls for a learning environment and school culture that is visibly confident in the faith – with space and time to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ anew....' p.4.

I take the opportunity here to acknowledge the work and commitment of teachers, governors, youth chaplains, and volunteers in our schools and in tertiary education.

5. Mission with Workers



Since Pope Leo XIII's social teaching encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the Church has been committed to upholding the dignity and rights of workers. Pope John Paul II talked of the *Gospel of Work*, at the heart of which is the understanding of work as our share in God's act of creation as 'co-creators' (*Laborem excerns*).

During this period of globalisation and the relocation of jobs away from this country because of low wage competition from foreign countries, it is important that we re-double our promotion of the right to a just wage and the important role of unions.

Somehow we need to bridge the gap between the workplace and the worshipping community. I commend all in our diocese involved in ministry to industry, and I particularly invite our permanent deacons – with their experience of the world of work – to explore ways of fostering mission with workers.

6. Mission with the Poor

As many of you know, our diocese has significant pockets of deprivation which are some of the highest in the country, reflected in high unemployment, social exclusion, poor housing stock, chronic ill health, teenage pregnancies and crime.

It is the experience of the Church around the world that the poor are the most open to the Gospel because – in large part – they recognise that Jesus is one with them, speaking to their conditions of powerlessness, suffering, and oppression in the language of transforming hope, love and justice. It is sad to observe that many of the poor seem to have deserted the Church in this country over the last thirty years. We have much to learn from the poor about the real power of the Gospel to change lives!

It is important that each parish continues to be aware of the nature and extent of social deprivation in our local communities, so as to serve the material and spiritual needs of the poor.

I particularly thank the *Society of St Vincent de Paul*, and the *Knights of St Columba* for their outstanding work among the poor.

7. Mission with Migrants

A special loving concern for the needs and gifts of all ethnic communities, migrants and asylum seekers is essential. Pope Benedict XVI had the following in his 2007 message for the World Day for Migrants and Refugees:

'In this misfortune experienced by the Family of Nazareth, obliged to take refuge in Egypt, we can catch a glimpse of the painful condition in which all migrants live, especially, refugees, exiles, evacuees, internally displaced persons, those who are persecuted'.

Each parish or deanery should on a regular basis identify the concrete needs of migrant groups i.e. settings for worship, service and social gatherings housing, also helping migrants to gain access to NHS provision and schools. Newly arrived migrants and their families are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination.

8. Mission with Older People

It is important that the Church affirms the gifts and responds to the needs of our ever-growing population of older people. I am very aware that in many cases grandparents are passing on the faith to their grandchildren. I believe we must find ways of assisting them in this.

With the so-called 'greying' of the population the dignity and rights of older people must become a priority of the Church. Parish and Deanery Pastoral Councils have a role in monitoring the provision of service to our older people and draw on their gifts, especially prayer, which they offer for the good of the Church.

9. Mission with the Sick and Housebound

The Church since the earliest days has seen the sick and housebound as holding a special place in her life. Pain and suffering, borne with courage, patience, and hope, give the sick a unique share in the passion, death and resurrection of Our Lord. The sick and housebound can be eloquent witnesses to the *Gospel of Suffering* (Pope John Paul II) showing us that there is more to quality of life than freedom from pain. The sick are a powerhouse of prayer for the Church, very much forming a 'Carmel in every parish'.

I wish to encourage all those who support and care for the sick and housebound, particularly their families and friends. They, too, participate in the pain and suffering of their loved ones, like Mary at the foot of the Cross. It is important that parishes respond to the needs of the sick and their carers.



I want to express my appreciation to the hospital chaplains, religious congregations, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, the various Lourdes groups, and the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for their commitment to serving the sick.

10. Mission to our World

The Catholic martyr Alfred Delp SJ wrote the following which we would be wise to take to heart, *'No one will believe in the message of salvation and of the Saviour, if we have not worked ourselves to the bone in the service of man, whether he be sick in mind or body, in his social, economic or moral life, or whatever...'*

Our active support of Catholic agencies such as CAFOD, Aid to the Church in Need, Pax Christi, and Catholic Caring Services must continue to grow and develop; so, too, our co-operation with inter-church and interfaith justice and peace initiatives. I commend the work of the Diocesan Faith and Justice Commission and ask that all parishes promote and engage with their work.

C. SUSTAINABLE. Jesus commands us to take nothing for our journey

Luke (9: 1-3) tells us that we need detachment from material things to have the apostolic freedom necessary to respond to Jesus' call. Jesus asks us this question – where is your treasure? This world or Heaven? *'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'.* (Luke 12:34).

With this in mind, I urge you to give serious attention to the mission of our Church. Passing on the living Faith must take precedence over structures. One writer expresses it this way: *'We are in the business of preserving the Faith and passing it on – not preserving church buildings, beautiful and historic though some of them might be'.*

From this perspective, I urge you to consider the reality that strengthening our mission must take priority over maintaining buildings that once served their purpose, but do so no longer.

1. Resource Sharing

As part of the Mission Review consultation, *Parish Pastoral Councils*, *Deanery Pastoral Councils* and *Deanery Clergy Conferences* may need to focus on the linking or merging of parishes, and creating new parishes, so as to strengthen the Church's mission in any given area. Certainly the sharing of resources, catechetical and sacramental programmes and personnel is going to be increasingly important. Thinking 'outside the frame' of the parish is required by the changing circumstances facing us all.

2. Resource monitoring

Every parish should have an active *Finance Committee* to foster stewardship and co-responsibility regarding parish administration and finances. Parishioners should be made aware through this body of the general financial condition of the parish including debts and liabilities.

Demographics indicate that Catholic schools are serving a significant number of families who are not practising and others who are not Catholics. Deaneries or groups of parishes need to urgently address the question of how to maintain the support of our schools. How do we encourage people to financially support our schools?

What to do next.

Individual. It is important that each one of us reflects and prays about how best to respond to the needs of our local community. I recommend that each of us chooses one priority to be the focus of our personal action for the next 12 months.

Parish. It is important that each parish promotes prayer and reflection on these needs. I recommend that parishes and deanery pastoral councils hold meetings for people to discuss these priorities and draw up an action plan specific to the community.

How does this fit into the 'Fit for Mission' review? The purpose of considering these priorities is for each parish to choose a minimum of two priorities, one from section A. Sacraments, and one from section B. Mission. It will be necessary for each parish to consider both priorities in section C. Sustainability. Please include your choices and action plan in the Parish Evaluation Form.

Section Three. How do we change our diocese, including our buildings and structures, so that we become the communion God calls us to be?

1. The shape of the Church to come

Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:32.

As I travel around the diocese I am very aware of the truth of Jesus' exhortation to his disciples, *'The Kingdom of God is among you'* (Lk 17:21). I see signs of the Kingdom in the fruitful lives of so many of you – priests, deacons, religious and laity, young and old – who are faithful to our shared apostolic calling - *gathered and sent*.



The Kingdom of God is among us now! And this gives me great hope for our future. As we begin this review of our mission we must keep this hope as our guiding light, our true 'north', as we set our sights and face the reality of the situation that confronts our diocese.

The reality is that we are becoming, as Our Lord puts it, a 'Church of the Little Flock'. Here are some key indicators of the reality of our situation:

- 47 of the present 109 priests serving within the Diocese are over the age of 60 years. Therefore, I estimate that in approximately 5 years time there will be around 70 active and available priests ready to serve our present 108 Parishes, Mass centres, prisons, and hospitals. We estimate that by 2020 there may be between 50-60 under the age of 75 active in the diocese.
- Many parishes have a Mass attendance of less than one-third and some with less than one-quarter of the number attending in the mid-twentieth century and many churches have less than 100 people at any one Mass.
- An inevitable further reduction in Mass attendance and an almost certain consequential drop in parish income over the next 10 years, set against a probable 50% increase in the cost of building work, fuel and power and salaries over this same period, makes it inevitable that a reduction in the number of church buildings will be necessary, if parishes are to be sustainable.
- A number of our church buildings, provided for the needs of the early twentieth century, are no longer suitable or convenient for use for the present needs of the people.
- Insuring large and expensively built churches is now proving unaffordable, and, major repair or upgrading projects are impossible to fund even when grants are available for churches which have been listed by the Government as buildings of special significance.
- Our use of church-sites, lands and buildings – especially if they are redundant – needs to be looked at very carefully. How might they be used in the service of the Church and wider community?
- Many baptised Catholics lead lives almost 'entirely divorced from Christianity' (*General Directory for Catechesis* 25). And it is an inescapable fact that 85% of children attending our primary and secondary schools come from non-practising families. The question of how to evangelise in these circumstances is imperative!

Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for the Kingdom of God is among us!

I recall that when Pope John Paul II was questioned about the numerical decline of Christianity in the West, he answered,

‘The Gospel is not a promise of easy success. It does not promise a comfortable life to any one. It makes demands and, at the same time, it is a great promise...the promise of victory through faith for man, who is subject to many trials and setbacks.... To find life, one must lose life; to be born, one must die; to save oneself, one must take up the cross. This is the essential truth of the Gospel, which always and everywhere is bound to meet with man’s protest’. (Crossing the Threshold of Hope. P. 103-104).

Today the Gospel makes new demands on us, and at the same time the Gospel is a promise of victory, for we are a people who are *gathered and sent by the Lord*.

2. The Fit for Mission goals

To summarise, the ‘Fit for Mission’ exercise has three goals:

1. ***To enable each one of us to change and become the person God calls us to be, through living fully our call to be Apostles – gathered and sent by the Lord.***
2. ***To change our parishes, including our buildings, in response to the changing social and economic circumstances, so we become the people God calls us to be.***
3. ***To change the diocese so we become the communion God calls us to be.***

3. The objectives for changing our Parishes

- To examine different ways of structuring and re-deploying our priestly manpower so that the reduced number of priests will continue to be able to ‘preach, sanctify and rule’ in our parishes.
- To make sure that the parishes and diocese are financially solvent in the immediate and long term.
- To ascertain the number and location of present church buildings that are necessary for the Church to fulfil its mission, taking into account the decline in Catholics regularly attending Mass.
- To allow us together to identify underused and unsustainable church buildings with the aim of closure as part of a process of parish merger.
- To link or merge parishes, bringing together people from adjacent struggling communities, to enable a fuller celebration of the Mass and greater participation in the Church’s mission through pooling people’s charisms and financial resources.

All areas are different, with specific needs ranging from urban and rural parishes, to those in town or city centres. Each parish has its own strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all solution is not desirable. Flexibility is key to this process, taking into account available and committed personnel and financial sustainability:

- ❖ One possible model of parish I would ask you to consider is using one Church as a regular Mass centre catering for an attendance of say 400 people. However, geography and population may mean this is not achievable in parts of the diocese. Therefore, in some parishes a second church (a chapel-of-ease) may be required.
- ❖ Rural areas will require a mixture of ‘stand alone’ parishes with a much smaller attendance to keep their missionary presence, as well as parishes served from another parish, as is happening already in some parts.

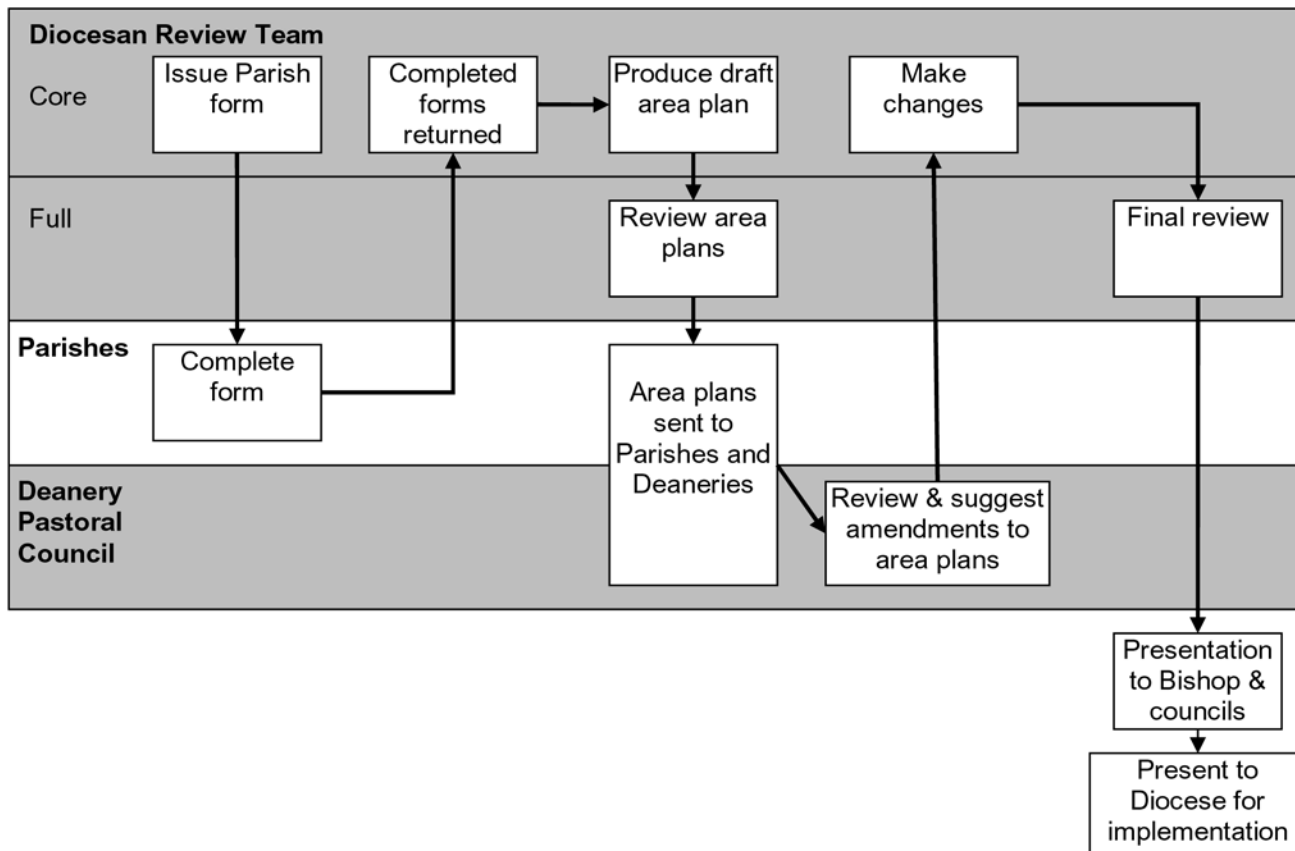
- ❖ A 'missionary presence' is also truly imperative, especially in areas that have particular needs i.e. social deprivation, migrant/ethnic groups.
- ❖ To develop ways to cater for those areas with low Mass attendance and a high number of non-practising Catholics who request baptism and funeral rites only.
- ❖ To create identifiable Catholic centres in our major towns and cities. Their membership would be drawn from a number of smaller existing communities that are no longer sustainable.

4. Prayer

As the 'Fit for Mission' review unfolds in the months ahead, I ask that you join me in daily prayer. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Lord and Mother of the Church, and the Lancashire and Cumbrian martyrs, may we know ever more deeply the loving presence and renewing power of the Holy Spirit. May Mary's example of trust in the power of prayer and confidence in the promises of Christ inspire us as we are gathered and sent out to bring Christ to the world.

Section Four. How the ‘Fit for Mission’ Review will work.

Three bodies will play an active part in the ‘Fit for Mission’ review process – the Parishes, the Deanery Pastoral Councils, and the Diocesan Review Team.



The Parishes

- Discuss this guide document and set mission priorities
- Receive Parish Evaluation Form
- Complete Form in consultation with other Parishes in the Deanery as required to provide information about sacramental life, mission and sustainability.
- Return form to the Diocesan Review Team
- Receive draft area plan – based on the submitted Parish Evaluation Forms for the area
- Participation in Deanery Pastoral Council to review and suggest any amendments required to the draft area plan
- Implement agreed area plan.

Deanery Pastoral Councils

- Assist Parishes in completion of Parish Evaluation Forms by providing a forum for parishes to discuss and decide on co-ordination and co-operation in setting up, and acting on, mission priorities.
- Receive draft area plan
- Review and suggest any amendments required to the draft area plan
- Return draft area plan with suggestions
- Assist in implementation of agreed area plan

The Deanery Pastoral Councils may need to strengthen their numbers by co-opting additional members with experience in property, planning, and finance, to assist in responding to the draft plans.

The Diocesan Review Team and its Core group.

What is the Diocesan Review Team?

The bishop will convene a group of priests, deacons, religious, and lay people drawn from across the diocese who will meet monthly to pilot and facilitate the 'Fit for Mission' Review. They will represent the views of the clergy and laity, chosen by reference to deanery pastoral councils and to central diocesan organisations, religious, lay societies, governors, and teachers.

What is the Core group?

The bishop has convened a small group of advisers who will meet weekly to manage the review process, facilitate consultation with parishes and deanery pastoral councils, produce draft plans based on that consultation, and incorporate suggestions that improve the plans.

What will the Core group do?

It will draw up and distribute the Parish Evaluation Forms. After evaluating the returned forms, the core group will draw up draft plans for the different geographical areas of the diocese. These will be presented to the diocesan review team, and then – with their agreement – will be distributed to the parishes and deanery pastoral councils for wider consultation.

IMPORTANT! The initial plans from the diocesan review team will be draft proposals. The deanery pastoral councils will be invited to make suggestions, amendments, or offer alternative plans. There are two requirements that must be followed if this consultation is going to work: first, that changes to any draft plan are workable and sustainable; second, that the deanery pastoral councils submit their responses to the draft plans by a set deadline.

The core group will then consider all comments and suggestions, and make changes which are necessary to improve the final diocese-wide plan.

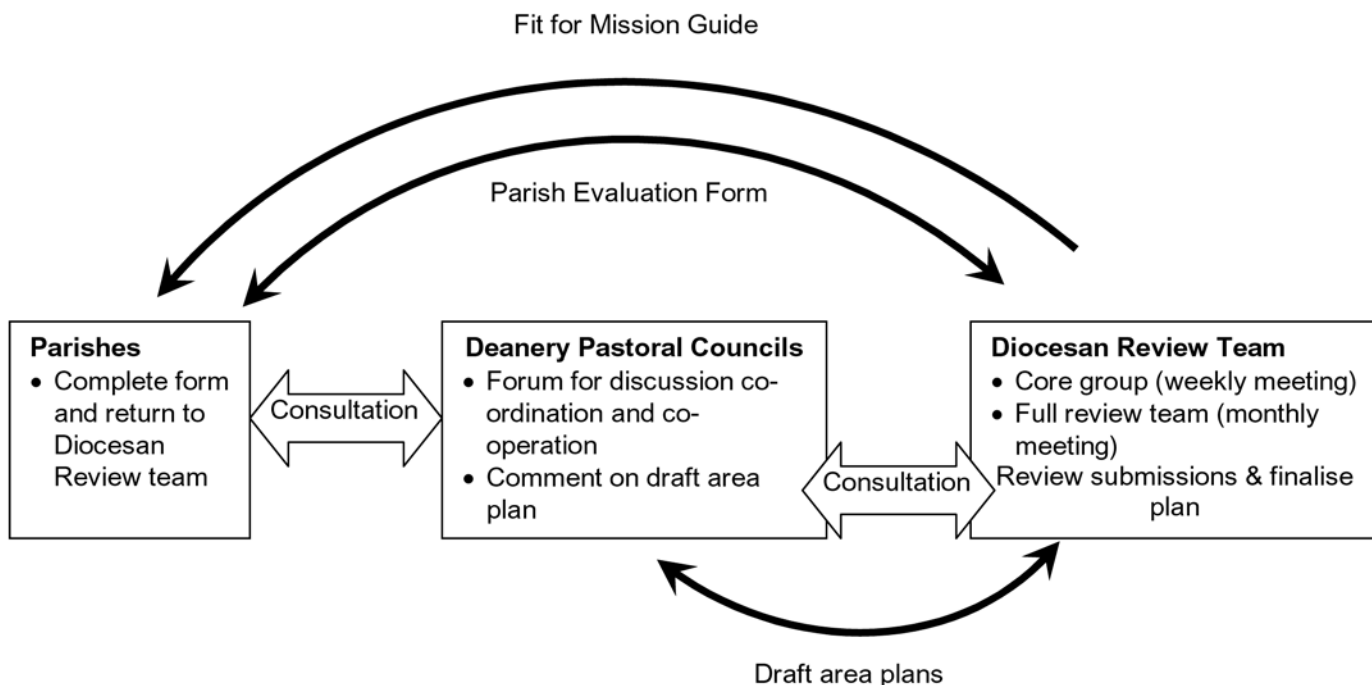
What will the Diocesan Review Team do?

The review team will receive copies of all core group plans and will meet monthly to give advice on proposals and progress. The final plan will be presented to the diocesan review team who will need to be satisfied that the best possible and most sustainable arrangement has been identified. Once the diocesan review team has given final agreement to the diocese-wide plan, it will be presented to the bishop with his councils.

The bishop will then give his final approval and present the plan to the diocese for implementation.

In summary, the Diocesan Review Team:

- Issue Parish Evaluation Forms
- Receive and review completed Parish Evaluation Forms
- Draw up draft area plans and send to Deanery Councils
- Receive and review suggestions of amendments to draft area plans
- Finalise area plans into a diocese-wide plan
- Present finalised plan to the Bishop and his councils.



Timetable

Phase 1

- **February:** Issue of the Bishop’s Pastoral Letter and this guide document – ‘Fit for Mission’, for distribution to every interested parishioner.
- **Lent:** Two diocesan wide meetings of all the clergy and lay representatives to enable consultation about the objectives and mechanics of the process.
- **Two weeks from start in February:** parish evaluation forms sent to every parish
- **From start in February for following eight weeks:** Individuals, families, parish groups, and deanery councils are to be asked to consider the questions which are raised in this guide, and use these considerations to inform the completion of the Parish Evaluation Form.
- **Eight weeks after start in February:** Parish send the completed Parish Evaluation Form to the Diocesan Review Team’s core group.

Phase 2

- **From end of week eight to week 16:** The core group study the information provided by the parish evaluation exercise, (this includes the responses to the ‘Fit for Mission’ guide questions which are incorporated into the Parish Evaluation Form). The core group begin drawing up the draft area plans, and present them to the Diocesan Review Team.
- **End of week 16:** draft area plans are distributed to deanery pastoral councils, parishes, and schools in the Blackpool, Kirkham, and Thornton deaneries (Fylde Coast area)
 - **End of week 16 to week 24:** Consultation and comments drawn up in Blackpool, Kirkham, and Thornton deaneries (Fylde Coast area)
 - **End of week 24:** responses sent to the core group by Blackpool, Kirkham, and Thornton deaneries (Fylde Coast area)
 - **End of weeks 18, 20, 22 and 24:** draft area plans for the other four areas (Preston, Lancaster, Cumbria South and Cumbria North and West) will be distributed at two weekly intervals. To be reviewed by Deanery Pastoral Councils over the next 8 weeks and a response sent to the core group

- **Six weeks after submission of response to draft area plan:** The final plan for the area will be available. Any further consultation needed with the deanery clergy conferences and the deanery pastoral councils takes place within a further period of 8 weeks.
- **End of week 50:** diocese-wide plan 'finalised'

Phase 3

- **End of week 50:** Bishop will consult with his councils and make his final decision on the implementation of the diocese-wide plan with any amendments which he considers to be proper.
- ***This will mark the end of the consultation period.***

Implementation

Implementation of the diocese-wide plan will then commence in stages.



Postscript

This is a consultation document with a small number of people involved in its preparation. The final version will be shaped when your thoughts, insights and wisdom are woven into it. Unless it inspires prayer, contributes to a change of mind and heart, leading us closer to Christ and His people then, I fear, it will remain just another document gathering dust on our shelves and desks. That, with Gods help, will not happen for it is a rallying call to mission in the power of the Spirit.

P. O'D
12/02/07