

‘Unfolding God’s Plan’

The Diocesan Vision

“Since they have an active role to play in the whole life of the Church, lay people are not only bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit, but are also called to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society”.

These words are from the Vatican II document ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’ [Gaudium et Spes]. It is 60 years since the Second Vatican Council was in session. Much has changed in the world, yet many of the challenges the Church Fathers addressed still tax us. However, the mission of the Church, the ‘People of God’, remains the same.

Since this document was promulgated, the Church has continued to focus its attention on *‘the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives; that world which is the theatre of man's history, and the heir of his energies, his tragedies and his triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ, so that the world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfilment.’* [Gaudium et Spes, para 2].

Within this context, Archbishop Bernard invites us, following the recent Synod, *“to look anew at our Church, in a spirit of discernment, with every Catholic being co-responsible with the clergy for the depth of our Communion, Participation and Mission. This means a prayerful examination of our own discipleship, with the aim of us working together to become missionary parishes, and therefore a missionary Church.”*

He re-affirmed this and gave it greater focus in his Pastoral Letter on Laetare Sunday: *“I have asked our clergy to reflect, among themselves and with you, on the present pattern of parish life and the people and resources that sustain it. I am asking you to consider where and how our diocesan priorities of evangelisation, formation, liturgy and worship and social outreach are already flourishing. I am also asking you to notice where they are not so evident and to see how parishes can work together, in one or more of these areas, to strengthen the Church’s local mission. Try to see co-responsibly what needs to change for the good of the Church’s mission within your parish or across the wider deanery.”*

He has asked us to reflect back on our experience during the recent pandemic and how it impacted on our daily life, particularly on our Catholic life. Hopefully, we can use this ‘jolt’ to the way we lived our life and the assumptions on which we based it to look forward and see how we as individuals, parishes and as the Church we can move forward in the coming years.

The Archbishop has presented us with the following Diocesan Vision Statement:

Our Vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

This 'Mission Statement' is a starting point for our prayer, reflection and future planning. *'Vision causes us to reflect on our inmost desires and dreams. It returns us to contemplating Christ's promises for us, the hopeful future He has for each person and for His whole Body. But what difference can that make to parish life? A good vision can help to... • Unite us; • Renew us; • Empower us; • Direct us; • Involve us.'*

When looking at **the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ** we reflect that mission does not necessarily mean being a missionary in the sense that many of us perceived it in our upbringing: going forth to far reaches of the world to bring the Word of God. However, it is about discovering our purpose and call.

To that end, we reflect on the following, in discerning our purpose and call, more often than not on our own doorstep:

"Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you." Mt 28: 19-20

"God made me to know him, love him and serve him in this world and be happy with him forever in the next." Penny Catechism

This leads to further reflection on **full of missionary disciples:**

'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)

'I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.' (John 13: 34-35)

Archbishop Oscar Romero reassures us that this is no easy task but one we can all work at within our own strengths and limitations:

"We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest."

Thus, through our baptism we are all called, or mandated, to be disciples, not just to be followers in a passive sense but in an active way of commitment and service to God and our neighbour.

A key element of our discipleship is co-responsibility: **disciples who work together co-responsibly**. Co-responsibility recognises that each of us has a mission which is complementary, not in competition. Because of our calling, co-responsibility is not optional, but is necessary for the mission of the Church.

This is rooted in Scripture:

*"Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body . . .
God put all the separate parts into the body on purpose.
If all the parts were the same, how could it be a body?
As it is, the parts are many but the body is one.
Now you together are Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it."* [1 Cor 12]

It is also reflected in the meditation of St. John Henry Newman:

*God has created me to do Him some definite service.
He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.
I have my mission – I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.
I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.
He has not created me for naught.
I shall do good, I shall do His work.
I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments.
Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away.
Therefore, I will trust Him.
He knows what He is about.*

During the opening session, in response to the Archbishop's call to reflect and respond to his invitation, the group explored the Diocesan Vision Statement as outlined above and participated in a number of activities to gain greater discernment of the implications of the statement for us as individuals, as a parish and as a diocese.

The first activity related to the recent pandemic:

How did we live out our Catholic lives during the 'Covid' times?

What did we miss and were grateful for when 'normal service' was resumed in the parish?

Has anything changed since then?

What did we learn that can help the parish grow to meet future challenges?

The second activity asked us to consider how the parish can grow, in a spirit of co-responsibility:

How does our parish help us to grow in our relationship with God and others?

How might it encourage even more growth, acting co-responsibly?

How does our parish identify and use the gifts of its people?

What do you think our parish should look like in the next 10 years ["fit for the future"]?

The third activity reflected on what we might put in to our own parish vision statement:

What would we put into our parish vision statement?

"Our Vision is to be a Catholic parish . . ."



The next session will:

- briefly review the outcomes of the previous meeting
- explore the 4 key themes of:
 - evangelisation
 - formation
 - liturgy and worship
 - social outreach
- . . . in relation to what they mean
- . . . what the diocese is doing to promote them
- . . . and, what we as parishes and deaneries can do to incorporate them into our lived experience.

So, even if you were unable to be present at the first session you will be most welcome to join us and participate in the subsequent sessions.