

## ***A Letter from the Director of Development to all Parishes and Stewards***

**27<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

Dear Fathers and Stewards,

I write as people are collecting the hard copies of the Vision Document: Shaping Our Future for distribution in your parishes this coming weekend. This letter contains additional information and suggestions that you can decide how to feed into the process in your Parish Partnership.

Tomorrow afternoon the latest video message from Bishop Alan will go live on the website and will most easily be accessed via the News tab. Please take steps to bring this to the attention of your parishioners and ask that they watch it. In some parishes previous video messages have been shown at the end of mass either in church or over coffee and that is great but please also ensure that a note is put in your newsletter this weekend and I would suggest the following:

### **“Vision Document: Shaping Our Future**

**This weekend marks a key milestone in the Steward of the Gospel process as the Vision Document: Shaping Our Future is published. Bishop Alan has recorded a video message to all parishioners that can be viewed on the Diocese’s website by clicking on the News button. Please take time to watch and listen to this message in the coming days. In the News section you will also find a link to the Vision Document: Shaping Our Future.**

**The Vision Document: Shaping Our Future is designed as an online resource in line with our early commitment to making better use of technology and it has links through to other websites and documents. Viewing the document on line enables it be read in large print and some people have access to read aloud functions. Wherever possible we would urge you to read the document online but in the parish we have hard copies of the booklets for those who cannot access the online version.”**

In addition to the main on-line version of the Vision Document: Shaping Our Future I am attaching a “greyscale” version that is easier and cheaper to photocopy if you wish to do that.

You will have recognised the importance of communication as you begin to work with your Parish Partnership and it is very much for you to decide with your partners how that communication should take place. However, by way of suggestions I offer the following.

- 1) If you have not already organised a get together between yourselves as Steward and Priest it would be a good idea to do so now.
- 2) If you have not yet fixed a date when the parishes in your Parish Partnership can come together it would be a good idea to do so now.
- 3) Within each Parish Partnership I would suggest that you appoint one of your Stewards to be the “Point Person” for communicating with me. There will inevitably

be questions and points of clarification that your Parish Partnership will want to raise during 2019 and in order to keep communication channels effective and efficient it will help if the Point Person is the one to bring those to me and to whom I respond. As we seek to ensure that everyone has a voice in this exercise it is suggested that the Point Person might not be from what some people might perceive as the biggest or the dominant parish in your Parish Partnership. This will be one small way of keeping in mind that this is about us all working together.

- 4) Each Parish partnership should quickly develop ways of communicating internally and at different levels according to your situation and preferences. It is vitally important that you communicate a lot and that your parishioners are kept informed of what is going on. Through this process some groupings have used Parish Websites, Parish Facebook Pages, Twitter, email groups, closed Facebook Groups or WhatsApp Groups or similar as a means of keeping in contact and sharing information. This sort of technology is a real gift and extremely useful for sharing information and providing people with regular updates; but be careful not to substitute face to face and telephone conversations, especially when there are tricky or sensitive matters that need to be resolved. You will need to use all means available to you depending on what needs to be communicated.
- 5) In the spirit of our discernment together please always be respectful, kind and loving in your dealings with one another. As Bishop Alan says in the video message; how we work together and face the challenges ahead can be a form of evangelisation in and of itself.
- 6) Keep in mind that by Advent 2019 your Parish Partnership Plan should be ready in draft form. That may be a year away but that year will go by quickly so please start now and do not put it off.
- 7) Each month during 2019 I will produce an e-bulletin for everyone. It will pick up on any common themes and frequently asked questions. You will be able to share it more widely around your Parish Partnership and I would be grateful if you would find space in your parish newsletters to remind people about it. Even now I come across people who do not know anything much about this process. 2019 will be a year when we must ensure that everyone is aware of the changes that are to come.
- 8) After your Parish Partnership has had a first meeting as a partnership it may well be that you would like me to come and attend a second Parish Partnership meeting to discuss some specific issues. Please do contact me to arrange that. It is important however that you have already met and discussed things as a parish partnership first. My presence at such meetings inevitably changes the dynamics and in the first instance it is more beneficial for you to talk among yourselves. My role will be to help you to find solutions/answers rather than provide them. In the spirit of subsidiarity it is important that local solutions and local answers are found wherever possible.
- 9) If you do not already have any younger people involved in your wider Stewards of the Gospel groups then may I suggest that renewed efforts are made to find younger people to help in 2019. Among other things they will bring a different perspective and additional means of communicating across your parish partnership.

10) Shortly you will see a new section of the diocesan website dealing with each of the 12 Strands of Renewal and Restructuring as well as other new features. This will be another way that we can communicate and share ideas. In December I will write separately to explain how we will use that medium.

You now know who is in your Parish Partnership and your task is to plan a shared future that uses all of your combined time, talents and treasure. You are blessed with many people with many gifts, and using the platform of the Parish Partnership you are now invited to re-imagine how you can best evangelise the world around you with all of your combined gifts. You can re-imagine how you can maximise the three objectives contained in the Vision Document: Shaping Our Future. Be bold in all of this.

Care and concern for each other should be uppermost in your minds throughout this exercise. Care and concern for our priests must be a particular motivation in all we do. Lay people have an opportunity and a duty to work with our priests to maximise our objectives and to ensure that only a proper share of the burden falls upon our priests. Priests equally must find new ways to allow and empower lay people to help share the burden of the work we share together in appropriate ways.

Partly for this reason it would be my suggestion that when you meet you consider Mass venues and times at an early stage. You know how many priests you are planning for, and that combined with the rules on how many Sunday Masses each priest can celebrate will to some extent provide you with a framework.

For the avoidance of doubt it has been the tradition that a Mass schedule should not require a priest to celebrate more than 3 Masses in the period between Saturday evening (Vigil) and Sunday evening. It is not proposed to change that.

Our focus should be on how many Masses a priest can celebrate well rather than to focus merely on the absolute number permitted. This is for the benefit of both priest and people.

The Bishop's policy is not normally to permit three Masses on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation in addition to one on Saturday evening or the Vigil of a Holy Day apart from exceptional circumstances such as First Communion Masses or Diocesan celebrations or in the case of a Holy Day for a Catholic School.

In terms of timescale please bear two things in mind.

Firstly, Bishop Alan wants your draft Parish Partnership Plans for his consideration by Advent 2019 so that they can be finalised by Easter 2020.

Secondly, the plans you are drawing up will be based on the long term position described in the Vision Document: Shaping Our Future. Implementation of the plan is

something we will work towards carefully but with a sense of urgency so that we reach the long term solution in the medium term, ready to meet the challenges ahead.

I am a resource at your disposal throughout this part of the process and I look forward to assisting you as we work together to evangelise our diocese.

Finally, I am very grateful to the team at Design Portfolio for all their hard work and skill in bringing this Vision Document: Shaping Our Future to life for us. [www.design-portfolio.co.uk/](http://www.design-portfolio.co.uk/)

Kind Regards,

*Steven Webb*

Director of Development