

In the autumn of 2017 Bishop Richard initiated a consultation programme throughout the Arundel & Brighton diocese. He set 5 questions concerning the way forward for the church over the next 12 years when congregations might have grown or remained constant while the number of clergy decreased. Several parishioners in our deanery as well as throughout the Arundel & Brighton diocese responded by giving careful consideration to the questions and supplying honest, forthright answers, and a team from the parish analysed our responses. While we await the Bishop’s draft proposal which he hopes to bring with him to Eastbourne to present and discuss with us in October, our parish responses are summarised below.



QUESTION 1: What 3 things do we most need for Mission Effectiveness?

4 subgroups which all the responses could be categorised into:

1. Congregation (pastoral):

- A welcoming atmosphere.
- Engagement in charitable works – e.g. Hospice, Eastbourne Network.
- Being more open to the wider community, standing up for our beliefs and showing good example to other Christians and non-Christians.
- More respectful behaviour in church during Mass. The Liturgy is the heart of the matter - the Mass.
- Reaching out to and involvement of the youth and young adults.
- Outreach to housebound, homeless and families suffering unemployment and financial hardship.
- Commitment, energy and enthusiasm.
- Co-operation between all the different groups and factions in the parish.
- Social contact and open discussion groups.
- Enthusiasm and support from the congregation for various projects.
- Parishioner participation, empowerment of parish groups and teams, setting up councils for clusters of churches.
- Wider inclusion/invitation to get involved.
- A non-judgemental attitude and well-trained and enthusiastic youth leaders.
- Prayer partners to families whose children are baptised. Community outreach.
- Paid roles for the Lay-faithful to attract those with expertise and talent who cannot afford to give their time away for free.
- Finance to cover printing, stationery, telephone, travel and postage.

2. Congregation (formation):

- Improved catechesis of parishioners - both children (in schools) and adults a better understanding of the Gospel, other scriptures, the sacraments, the Holy Rosary, Lectio Divina, etc.
- We must be a more prayerful community - recognising that we are dependent on the Holy Spirit. Prayer groups.
- Necessary to have a clear Evangelization programme in place.
- A focus on Prayer and Adoration. Fasting.
- Lots of books in the parish rooms – encourage reading of the lives of saints, doctrine, etc.
- Use the aids available from Crew Trust, etc. – under-used at present.
- Revitalise needs of the young (18 – 30) in today’s society.
- Good liturgy and encouragement of a thriving Mass attendance - across all ages.

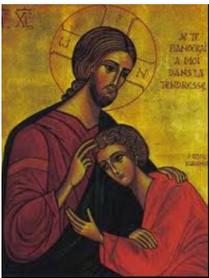
3. Clergy:

- Commitment by priests. An openness by priests to the people, esp. the young. More visiting.
- Leadership from the priests – effective teams.
- Prepare seminarians for service, not for ambitious careers.
- Promotion of closer interaction with other Christians, other faiths, ecumenical services.

- Humility.
- More Deacons needed and better use of those which exist already.

4. Pope Francis/Curia/Church-wide:

- Priests should be married and better prepared for their service, with the status of deacons being enhanced, and inclusion of women.
- Improve the Church's image in the public arena – sex scandals and the Church's response have undermined public respect for the clergy – Church needs to recognise its failings and adapt to modern life to become more relevant.
- Canon Law needs to be updated with respect to the modern age.
- More contact with other denominations.
- Promote message of Christian Joy, less emphasis on rules and more emphasis on “counsel of perfection”.
- Conduct some market research among young men to ask why they are not considering the Priesthood.
- Introduce a new level of “Pastor”, who has role of priest.
- There needs to be a willingness to change.



QUESTION 2: What Roles Belong to the Priests?

- Celebrating Mass and the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Preaching the Gospel
- Directing understanding of matters of faith and doctrine; keeping the faithful up to date with Church affairs
- Inspirational leadership and vision
- Providing spiritual guidance and support, including how this relates to real life
- Overseeing and taking important decisions
- Visiting – the sick and dying and those in distress; homes, schools and hospitals
- Leading pilgrimages
- Encouraging the laity in their various roles within the parish; facilitating training where appropriate
- Encouraging parish community activities, spiritual and social
- Connecting with all parishioners – including Involvement with families, the young and those Mass attendees/parishioners who do not initiate conversations.



QUESTION 3:

What Roles can best be carried out by the Lay Faithful?

In the responses, the 4 main areas were identified as follows:

Practical running of the church – utilising the laity's expertise to run:

- Finance,
- Administration,
- Major building works, general and day-to-day maintenance,
- Health & safety including safeguarding,
- Media relations.

Pastoral care –

- Visiting the sick and elderly, hospitals, prisons and hospices,
- Helping the whole local community, charitable works,
- Setting up young adult groups, marriage support, marriage preparation, giving lifts to church, campaigning for social causes.

Lay ministry –

- Administering the sacraments except confession and ordination, conducting Eucharistic services,
- Training by organising/leading evangelisation programmes and courses in education/catechesis teaching, including Alpha, Relit, Discipleship, Adult and Spiritual Formation, Lectio Divina, spiritual self-development, bible studies, ecumenical outreach; training male and female acolytes and lectors,
- Conducting of liturgy, including children's liturgy, by catechists,
- Undertaking the ministries of welcoming, reading, altar serving, music, etc.,
- Running organisations, e.g. prayer groups, Mother Theresa, CWL, etc.,
- Maintaining internal/external communication, newsletters, websites.

Social/Community activities –

- Running social events, sharing between generations, meals, teas,
- Setting up clubs and groups informed by Christian morals,
- Fund raising.



QUESTION 4:

What factors, do you think, have brought about the present situation?

Church

- Authoritarian approach, introspection.
- Confusion about church's direction, being out of touch to social changes with a resistance to change and lack of vision for the future.
- The Ordinariate is seen as a division in the community.
- A selective attitude to our Catholic Faith by some Laity and even priests.
- A lack of discussion (in hierarchy and laity) about fully implementing "VC II"
- Confusion between laity and priests about the role of laity of the last ten years.
- Lack of money.

Priesthood

- There are not enough priests entering the vocation and the priests we have now are beginning to age.
- Lack of promotion for vocations.
- Not seen by young men as a viable option - a lonely role.
- Young men were reluctant to enter priesthood because of the vow of celibacy while married clergy are admitted from other denominations.
- Vocation seen as a career path not as a service.
- Attitude to divorced Catholics, women priests.
- Shortage of priests coming from Ireland and elsewhere.
- Lack of pastoral support for priests.

Secular Society and Culture

- That the effect of a secular society with broken families, liberal moral views consumerism and indifference to religion in general.

- Parents not bringing their children to Mass on a regular basis.
- Parental expectations - some parents are more interested in their sons achieving material success than considering the priesthood or religious life.
- Busy lives, other Sunday distractions e.g. sport; parents not practicing so not inspiring their children, youth drifting away
- A lack of moral teaching - especially sexual morality - so that many cannot explain or defend Catholic moral teaching to themselves or others.
- Neglect of devotion to true belief in the Mass and the Real Presence.
- Culture of the internet and computers.
- Negative presentation of faith on TV/Internet.
- Individualism and less community orientation.
- Focus on careers with demanding employment
- Influx of laity from outside diocese.

Youth

- Poor RE teaching in our schools (NB i.e. insufficient numbers of practicing Catholic teachers in our schools).
- Political ideology within school teaching.
- Failure to adequately answer the questions of young people.
- Appeal of religion to the young is missing with lack of Youth leadership through groups and schools.
- Age of Confirmation is too high.
- Sacraments take a second place to Education and Career.

Women

- Marginalisation of women.
- Church not being prepared to involve women in the higher ministries.

Scandals

- An aggressive attitude towards faith with damaging cases scandals and sexual crimes against clergy causing a loss of respect for priests.
- The church's failure to communicate effectively with the media.



QUESTION 5:

Starting Arundel & Brighton from scratch with 25 priests - where to put them?

- Some suggested a straight sharing of priests around 25 towns: e.g. Arundel, Barnham, Battle, Bexhill-on-Sea, Billingshurst, Brighton, Burgess Hill, Crawley, Crowborough, Danehill, Eastbourne, East Grinstead, Hailsham, Handcross, Hastings, Haywards Heath, Heathfield, Horsham, Horsted Keynes, Littlehampton, Mayfield, Robertsbridge, Rye, Seaford, Wadhurst.
- Choose the larger towns/more densely populated areas e.g. 15 major centres, with 10 priests used as peripatetics.
- NB. Need to keep in mind good transport links.
- Areas of social deprivation should be prioritised.
- Have three priests living together in the following places: Hastings, Eastbourne, Brighton, Chichester, Guildford, Crawley, Reigate, Uckfield, plus one remaining priest in Arundel. Each Sunday, Mass could be celebrated in the main town by one priest whilst the other two priests visit surrounding areas on a rota basis to celebrate Mass, with Liturgy of the Word at centres which are not visited that Sunday. Having three priests together will build in support for the clergy and combat loneliness.
- A few suggested that there should be four (or five) bases in the diocese: North, South, East and West (and Central) with priests working as a team.

- Base the priests on the existing 13 Deaneries.
- More use made of priests from religious orders.
- There should be more deacons.
- Base them in areas with Catholic schools, hospitals and multiple churches.
- Have parishes run by Laity - with all priests being itinerant! Use internet to share sermons.
- Consider married and/or women priests.
- Invite temporary placements from priests from abroad.
- "Leave Fr Raglan in Eastbourne where he is a beacon of faith ..."
- Attendance at a weekday Mass could suffice.