

Journeying Together through Easter



This edition of *Partnership Matters* takes in the period of the greatest feast of our Catholic Calendar – and the follow-up to the major event it commemorates. We are, of course, talking about the Resurrection.

But before those early disciples grasped what had happened, there was a great deal of confusion, pain and fear. For some, it felt as if the bottom had fallen out of their world. For Jesus, the events preceding the Resurrection involved hideous suffering, death and days in a cold tomb.

This journey through suffering, loss and death - and into new life - is referred to as the Paschal mystery. It is central to our lives as Christians and we can apply it to all sorts of circumstances.

As Partnerships take shape, many of the characteristics of the Paschal journey can be found. It is unrealistic to expect that everyone should be positive about it all the time. Some parishes are discovering that they really can do more in partnership with others than they ever could on their own. For others, there is confusion and a deep sense of loss. Though we can look forward in hope, we cannot short-circuit the Paschal process. Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, some are wrestling with what God seems to be leading us towards. Others feel deep pain as things die and are lost. Still others feel the emptiness and hopelessness of the Saturday after Jesus died. And some see glimpses of the new dawn on the horizon.

The Church does not rush us through the post-Resurrection accounts but, over seven weeks, keeps our focus on the new life the Resurrection offers and Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit to be an advocate – and inspiration – to his Church. Unlike those first disciples, we do not have to wait for the coming of the Spirit. We will celebrate the feast of its descent at Pentecost, but the Spirit is alive in us and in our communities today and will be a sure hope and guide for all that is to come.

Property and Community Review

The February/March edition of *Partnership Matters* included a summary of the proposed Property and Community Review (PCR) which each partnership will be asked to undertake. In response to some questions we received we felt it important to clarify a couple of points relating to the process:

- The two coordinators appointed by each partnership will be trained in the PCR. This training will promote transparency, openness and the importance of a collaborative approach to ensure that each parish has a voice throughout the process.
- Each Partnership Development Group (PDG) will receive regular updates and feedback from the two coordinators who are leading the review in their area. The PDG will be responsible for submitting the final proposals to the Diocese.

Guidance will soon be issued to partnerships to assist in recruiting the two coordinators while also outlining the timescales for the review.

If you would like to be involved in the process as either a property or community 'lead' or to contribute to the review, please contact your PDG in the first instance.

The Department for Property can be contacted for further information on 0191 2433303 or email property@diocesehn.org.uk

Council of the Laity



On Saturday 17th February the first meeting of the reconstituted Council of Laity was hosted by Bishop Séamus at St Cuthbert's House. The members of the council are now the Partnership

Chairs, representatives of young adults and religious orders together with Bishop Séamus; and with Fr Jeff Dodds as the chaplain to the council. The Bishop has asked Nigel Lightfoot, chair of the Blackfriars Partnership, to be the initial chair of the council and Nigel sets out here some of the key outcomes of the first meeting.

'The council began with a celebration of Mass followed by an opening address by Bishop Séamus who emphasised the important role of the council to provide him with advice and to discuss new initiatives to achieve his goals for the diocese. The challenge for us all is to respond effectively to the reducing numbers of priests and worshippers. Bishop Séamus stressed the need for transformation in addition to personal formation and that we needed to look at the development and spiritual formation of a new lay leadership responsibility. An important aspect will also be the support the laity can give to our priests as they experience this transformation.

This led into a lively and stimulating discussion of the transformations needed to adapt to these challenges and how we achieve them effectively and safely.

Working in groups and reporting back to the plenary session the council identified the priorities for its work as:

- Formation of 'Lay Leadership'
- Support for the Clergy
- Communication
- Fostering personal development to become better disciples
- Working with the Council of Youth

The council agreed that these priorities would be worked on between meetings, and draft papers are being prepared by a small advisory group to be honed by the council members and presented for discussion at the next council meeting.'

The Art of Spiritual Discernment

Pope Francis' Prayer theme for March this year was *Formation in Spiritual Discernment*. His intention was "that the Church may appreciate the urgency of formation in spiritual discernment, both on the personal and communitarian levels". This theme speaks very powerfully to our Diocese as we discern the way forward for ourselves and our communities.

It is possible to do this alone but it is much more effective when done with a trusted 'accompanier' or in a small group. This helps to ensure that the 'voice' we hear is the Holy Spirit and not just our own ego! Discernment – or the 'ability to judge wisely' – involves listening. At a parish or partnership level, we might make opportunities to spend time praying together (in silence and/or reflection on scripture or Church teaching – listening to each other – finding the common threads and seeing the path that God is laying before us. This process can be seen as part of what Teilhard de Chardin calls the 'slow work of God' but it is not passive or complacent. It is positive and determined to ensure that our final decisions are in accord with God's will for us.

Information on how to develop spiritual discernment at a personal and community level is available from the Departments for Spirituality and for Adult Formation. To find out more, get in touch with Amy Cameron or Kathryn Turner.



Young People:

Practical Steps for Parishes and Partnerships



A key priority for partnerships is our relationship with young people. This year's Youth Ministry Conference on Saturday 12th May at St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn, NE31 2ET is titled '*Practical Steps for Parishes and Partnerships*' and will offer twelve workshops to help parishes and partnerships to reflect on ways they can engage with children and young people. The annual Confirmation Training Day has been incorporated into the programme, reminding us that Confirmation preparation is an integral part of our youth ministry.

The keynote address will be given by Fr Dominic Howarth, who is responsible for Pastoral Formation and Youth Services in Brentwood. He brings a wealth of practical experience in working with young people and will be an inspiring speaker to begin the day. Two exciting new initiatives for partnerships will be launched at the Conference:

The first is the *Youth Ministry Toolkit*. This online resource, provides both inspiration and practical help, and aims to assist partnerships to respond to the needs of young people. Sections included are: Vision, Partnership and Youth, Starting a Youth Group, Sacraments and More, Opportunities for Young People, Opportunities for Youth Ministers, Young People and Wellbeing, Safeguarding and Diocesan Guidelines.

The second is the *Faith in Action Award*. Now that the Pope John Paul II Award is firmly established in our diocese, the CYMFed Award for younger students will be launched. *Faith in Action* is an award for Years 6 to 11 and can be run in both

parishes and schools. Don Finn, CYMFed Project Officer, will introduce the award.

The forthcoming *Synod on Youth* challenges us to do two things: to encourage young people 'to recognise and accept the call to the fullness of life and love' and to ask them to help us to be effective in announcing the Good News in today's world. The Conference aims to inspire us to do both these things.

To adapt the familiar African proverb, 'It takes a whole partnership to raise a child', the day aims to bring together all those concerned about our young people. Booking forms are available in parishes or downloadable from www.ymt.org



Free Music Workshop

Just a quick reminder that the Diocesan Church Music Association is running a free workshop on Wednesday 25th April from 7-9 at St Hilda's Resource Centre, 391 West Road, Newcastle. Participants will be introduced to four Mass settings of contrasting styles. For more information contact Alison Purvis - alisonpurvis1@hotmail.com

The Summits



After three spirit-filled 'Summit' prayer events we are approaching our fourth and final 'Summit' of the liturgical year. This will be held in the west of the diocese at St Mary's Church, Bishop Auckland with worship being led by Ronan Johnston of Emmaus music. It promises to be a reflective and faith filled evening and we would love you to join us for this spiritual 'mountain top' experience.

Diocesan Festival 2018



The sixth Diocesan Festival takes place on Saturday 23 – Sunday 24 June 2018 at the Emmaus Youth Village in Consett. This year's theme is 'Encounter' and there will be talks from Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow OBE, Sr Judith Russi and Sara Bryson. It includes prayer, liturgy, reflection, music and activities for children and young people. It is an exciting opportunity for our whole Diocesan family to gather together and be encouraged in our faith. You are warmly invited to experience the festival as a parish group, as a family or as individuals. Look out for booking forms in your parish shortly.

'Unconference' for PDGs

We hope to see as many members of our Partnership Development Groups as possible on 26th April at 7pm at the Durham Centre, DH1 1TN for an informal gathering. This evening will include short inputs from PDG members and opportunities to speak with those in other PDGs. It is an important event for us all as we discern how to move forward as partnerships.

To book places for your PDG contact Amy on 0191 243 3316 or adult.formation@diocesehn.org.uk

Communications Project Update

In October we shared initial information about a major Communications Project looking at the development of an integrated and coherent approach to communication across the diocese.

By December, every Diocesan Department and representatives of 15 Parishes and 5 Partnership Development Groups had met with the researcher

while over 130 people completed an online survey which included responses from every partnership. A total of 24 clergy participated in the research undertaken by NE Solutions Ltd, a local IT and consultancy company. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took part in this phase of the project.

A report of the main findings was presented to the Bishop and the Diocesan Board of Trustees in March. This also offered a series of recommendations, together with a framework of Strategic Principles for adoption by the diocese. These were accepted, and the next stage is the establishment of a small working group to explore and take forward the recommendations.

Three key recommendations included:

- A review of parish/partnership systems and software, security and back-up processes.
- The implementation of a fully integrated and consistent brand across all diocesan and partnership/parish websites.
- A review of training needs.

Further updates will be provided in due course, but if you have any questions please contact the Department for Communications by email: webmaster@rcdhn.org.uk.

Thank you for your feedback

Many thanks to those of you who completed the 'Survey Monkey' questionnaire providing us with valuable feedback on *Partnership Matters*. The questionnaire will remain open until the end of April at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/QXBKXSF

Feedback so far indicates that 75% of respondents find *Partnership Matters* either 'useful' or 'very useful'. The most valuable aspects are felt to be ideas from other partnerships and information about events that are taking place.

82% of those completing questionnaires felt that the length of *Partnership Matters* was 'about right' with 18% suggesting it is too long. All responses will be used to inform future editions.

Partnership Matters is produced by the Department for Development and Renewal.

To provide contributions or feedback, please contact Nancy Gash or Tony Sacco on 0191 243 3304 or e-mail: hope@diocesehn.org.uk