**PUTTING OUT INTO DEEP WATER**

**31st May 2023 Leighlin Parish Centre**

**PARISHES IN ATTENDANCE:**

Leighlin, Paulstown, Muinebheag (Bagnelstown)

Myshall, Clonegal

Graignamanagh, Borris, St Mullins

**Welcome** - Bishop Denis spoke to all who had gathered to set the scene four our meeting and for this mission we are called to in putting out into deep water. He spoke of the decline in numbers of priests and priestly vocations as well as the decline in the attendance at Church of lay faithful. He highlighted that we have organised ourselves and the way we have operated as Church was no longer possible going into the future.

However, he reminded us that it is part of our collective baptismal calling to let the Holy Spirit speak to us in new ways at this time, as we explore how best to support one another in building the Church into the future. He ended by telling us that these meetings are but one chapter in a bigger story, and that we need to look after each other as we forge new identities as clusters of parishes, called to work more closely together.

**Diocesan Pastoral Council** – A member of the Diocesan Pastoral Council then gave an update of their work in supporting Bishop Denis over the last number of years. These meetings and subsequent gatherings come from the deliberations of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, as well as the Council of Priests in the Diocese.

**Purpose of the meeting:** The meeting was facilitated on Zoom by Jim Deeds and in the room by members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council. As we began, Jim set out the purpose of our gather as follows,

***This is a time of fellowship, prayer and conversation together. This is our first step on the way to ‘putting out into deep water’ together, going and growing where the Holy Spirit is leading us. In that way, our hope is that we leave feeling refreshed, energised, galvanised and a little clearer about where God is leading us.***

Further, Jim explained that the meeting would be structured around three questions to be discussed and one moment of prayer together.

**Guiding principles for our meeting**

* **Optimistic stance** – everyone we meet is doing the best they can with what they have at this moment in time
* **45 second rule** – there is very little that cannot be said in under 45 seconds. In other words, nobody will seek to dominate the conversation
* **St Paulinus of Nola** – ‘let us listen to all the faithful because in each one of them the Spirit of God breathes’. In other words, we will listen to and respect each other

**Q1** The map setting out your cluster of parishes represents one of our first movements ‘into the deep water’ as we seek to discover where the Holy Spirit is calling us to go and grow. When we see these new structures/ lines and when we hear what Bishop Denis has outlines, how do we feel? What do we think?

These are a cross-section of the answers we heard:

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| Some lay initiatives are already happening | It is good to meet here | We need this |
| There are county borders with in our cluster | Geography does not matte to the next generation | There is a difference between town and rural parishes |
| There are rivalries within clusters (sport etc) | Fear of a loss of identity | There are already relationship within our cluster |
| We need a change of mind set – not just about Masses but the whole work of the parish | There are large distances to be travelled in our cluster | We should go with the change and the challenge |
| We have been here before –can we move beyond this point this time | We need to get to know what is happening in other parishes | Rationalisation is needed |

**PRAYER:** We prayed with Luke 5:4-7, a section of Scripture where we hear Jesus tell Simon to put out into deep water and pay out his nets for a catch. We spent time meditating on this piece and shared some of our thoughts:

* Holy Spirit is telling us to do something new – the old ways are gone
* Share the load, be generous with each other
* Don’t give up
* Go on with others, not on our own
* Come together, pray together
* Trust in the Lord
* The Spirit makes the impossible, possible
* We can’t even breathe outside of the Spirit

**Q2** We agreed guiding principles at the start of this meeting and they helped ensure we did the best we could. As we prepare to put out into deep water together, going and growing where the Holy Spirit would call us, are their principles that we should agree to that would guide our decision making?

* Willingness to co-operate
* Listening deeply to each other
* Recognise and identify our needs
* Keep focus on the truth of our faith using simple language
* Be open to change
* Close the gap between priests and laity
* Be kind – this is unfamiliar to us all
* Face the facts as they are
* Treat everyone and their identity with respect
* Remain alive in the Holy Spirit

**Q3** We are proposing that we meet again in September to keep our dialogue going and to make more concrete plans into the future. In the months between now and then, are there some action points that your cluster of parishes might want to agree to that would help us go and grow where the Holy Spirit is leading us?

**Leighlin, Paulstown, Muinebheag (Bagnelstown)**

Parish Pastoral Councils to be recalled

Arrange a meeting of all PPCs together

A lay person to speak at all Masses about this meeting, using this report as a basis

In time, develop a forum for the cluster

**Myshall, Clonegal**

Tell people what is coming down the line

Further meeting to be arranged of the group from this evening

Highlight the problems of the geographical area covered in our cluster

Agree who will take the work forward – PPCs, core group?

**Graignamanagh, Borris, St Mullins**

Commit to gather in bigger numbers in September

Support needed to build structures in some parishes – no PPC in places at present but finance committee do a lot

**Reflection on meeting:** Bishop Denis gave us some of his reflections from the meeting, saying that what stood out for him was the image of help coming from other fishermen in our Scripture reading and how that inspires us to be helpful to each other on our journey. He reflected that it is clear that a lot is already happening and that even where there is no group described as a PPC, the work is going on. He finished by asking us to build our relationships and an identity as clusters of people working together in kindness for all.

**Next Meeting: Leighlinbridge Thursday the 7th September at 7pm for tea and coffee, with the meeting beginning at 7.30pm**