**PUTTING OUT INTO DEEP WATER**

**22nd May 2023, Aras Bhride**

**PARISHES IN ATTENDANCE:**

Balyna, Carbury, Edenderry, Rathangan, Kildare, Monasterevin, Suncroft, Curragh

**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. In this, he called us to look forwards, rather than backwards. 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:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Good neighbours | Inevitable | Numbers of priests is an issues | Better to share |
| This is stark | This is the future we were seeing coming | We have to leave our comfort zone | Staying as we are is not an option |
| Considered decisions must not be rushed | Good to have lay people interested | Big geographical distances | We need more volunteers |

**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:

* Keep trying, we will get results
* Leve the comfort zone
* Cast out the nets
* Not all up to me – just let the nets out into the water
* In the hands of the Lord
* Reach out, not only to our own faith but to others
* Trust in God
* The boat were filled to overload

**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?

* Accept the reality
* Trust and let go
* Work to recover the youth
* Be untied in our concerns for each other
* Listen without judgement
* Accept difference and change
* Accept limitations on people and time
* Don’t apply a 1950s model
* Some feel excluded – include people going forward
* Courage and co-operation

**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? These were the range of actions points and opinions we heard:

Feedback this meeting to PPCs

Do a pilgrim walk together

Communicate this meeting and the process to lay people

Train lay people for prayer services

Support each other’s liturgies

**Reflection on meeting:** Bishop Denis gave us some of his reflections from the meeting, saying that what stood out for him was the generosity of priests and people. We are not starting from scratch. Rather we are building on solid foundations. On this journey, we need to step in and support each other. He finished by thanking those who attended and looked forward to seeing all again.

**Next Meeting: Aras Bhride, Kildare on Monday 4th September at 7pm for tea and coffee, with the meeting beginning at 7.30pm**