**PUTTING OUT INTO DEEP WATER**

**26th June 2023 Church of the Irish Martyrs, Ballycane, Naas**

**PARISHES IN ATTENDANCE:**

Naas, Sallins, Two Mile House, Kill (Ardclough and Johnstown)

Allen, Caragh (including Prosperous), Newbridge

Kilcock, Cooleragh and Staplestown (Clane is in the cluster but had attended a previous meeting)

**Welcome** - Bishop Denis spoke to all who had gathered to set the scene for 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:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Hopeful | Fear of small parishes being left behind | Grateful for coming together like this | Communication and collaboration are key | Priests are spread thin as it is |
| Empower, educate and upskill the laity | This is change for the better | One cluster seems geographically large | How do we retain our identity? | The experience of Naas, Two Mile House and Salins has been good – how do we learn from this? |
| Where there is no priest the is a challenge for a community to be strong in how they live the Christian life | This is inevitable – the writing has been on the wall | There are a lot of possibilities to share resources | Evangelisation is going to be very important | Where will we be in ten years’ time? |
| Increasing role for lay people and deacons | Children’s faith groups are already working in some places | There is a lot going on in parishes already – how do we keep this going and form this new identity? | There are a lot of fish in the sea – the Church is the boat | Can we attract seminarians from outside Ireland? |

**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:

* Make me an instrument of your love
* Nothing is impossible if you have belief
* Follow me and I will make you fishers of people
* You have to have trust
* Reassurance
* Jesus is with us to guide us
* The Lord is my Shepherd
* ‘I want to use your boat’
* If you say so
* Don’t be afraid to take the first step
* The boats were sinking
* Have courage
* We ARE the plan
* Apart from God we can do nothing
* On our own we can’t, but with the Lord anything is possible
* ‘I am with you’

**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?

* Courage, prudence, wisdom and generosity
* We will keep God as centre and Gospel values as central
* We will align ourselves with God’s wishes, not the wider population
* Pray together
* Be open minded but stay within the parameters
* Live the Gospel – humility, compassion, patience, dying to the ego
* Respect individual identity
* Be inclusive, listening to and seeking to understand all voices
* Reach out with good communication
* Demonstrate generosity with resources
* Don’t expect too much too soon
* Find leaders within our young people
* Cast the net wide, trusting and respecting one another
* Invite the Holy Spirit to accompany and guide us
* ‘Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart’

**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? We split the bigger cluster into two sub groups for tis discussion.

**Naas, Sallins, Two Mile House, Kill (Ardclough and Johnstown)**

A synopsis of this meeting will be available for all congregations next weekend

A printed copy will be available in the porches over the summer

A joint training day for ministers of the Word will be held

The Kill group will be invited to provide Eucharistic ministers for hospital visitation – joining Naas, Two Mile House and Sallins who already provide this service

PPC Chairs and parish reps from all parishes will continue to meet

Safeguarding training, resources and meetings will be on a cluster basis from now on

**Allen, Caragh (including Prosperous), Newbridge**

A synopsis of this meeting will be available, with a lay person giving a verbal report to congregations

A feedback mechanism will be sought for people to respond

PPCs will meet together – this may or may not have happened by our September meeting

Any action will not raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled

**Kilcock, Cooleragh and Staplestown (Clane is in the cluster but had attended a previous meeting)**

A synopsis of this meeting and the overall process will be given to congregations

PPC members and/or parish groups will meet in the future

**Reflection on meeting:** Bishop Denis gave us some of his reflections from the meeting, saying that what stood out for him was that people shared freely. They spoke of having both fear and hope for the future. He noted that retaining identity was very important for the people who had gathered. Some of the sharing from our prayer time – the Church is a boat, God wanting to use ‘our boat’, and the idea that we are not on our own – stood out as important to him.

People were not surprised that we are where we are. We have known that this day was coming. It is clear, he told us, that while there is good work happening, we still have things to do to build relationships and a new identity a clusters of parishes. He said that the hope lay in lay people and priests working together and that this was in a tangible way a working out of Synod and Synodality.

**Next Meeting: Church of the Irish Martyrs on Wednesday 27th September at 7pm for tea and coffee, with the meeting beginning at 7.30pm**