**PUTTING OUT INTO DEEP WATER**

**22nd June 2023 Mount St Anne’s Retreat Centre**

**PARISHES IN ATTENDANCE:**

Emo, Portarlington, Killeigh, Mountmellick, Rosenallis, Clonaslee

Daingean, Rhode, Clonbullogue

**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:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| This is a new beginning | There is already a strong sense of connection | We are challenged to create stronger links between parishes | We need to face the reality – in this we have no choice | We need training for lay people for sacrament, funerals etc… |
| As we look forward, where are we going? | We don’t want to lose a sense of our identity as a Parish | Does the boundary line make a difference to parishioners? | The bigger cluster feels to big geographically and population-wise | What happens when we run out of priests |
| Good starting point for the next few years | We must embrace this new way of being Church | More parishes working together means more chances to share resources | Take sacraments out of school | Big area for a small number of priests |
| Where are all the young people – there is sadness about their absence | We have lots of empty churches | Fewer Masses may not increase the numbers, but lead to fewer people coming | No surprises here- this has been coming | We are anxious to see something happen - action |

**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:

* Trust in God
* Be brave and have hope
* Reach out into deep water
* We can do something
* Having two boats involved was mutually beneficial for both boats – more were nourished
* Comfort
* O-operation
* There is one Lord

**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?

* Collaborate and share
* Ensure the broadest participation and input from all
* Willingness to work with everybody
* Reach out particularly to the vulnerable and those who have been shamed
* Openness to accepting change, even if it doesn’t affect me
* Be youth-focussed and inclusive of all
* Our journey should be a prayerful one, bringing the Gospel to speak to people where their lives are
* Respect
* Be a listening ear to differing opinions and views
* Encourage families and young men
* Show good example and God’s love

**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.

**Emo, Partarlington, Killeigh**

Geography makes it hard to set things up across the cluster

Some of the parishes are already working together

**Mountmellick, Rosenallis, Clonaslee**

An open invitation was made for all in the cluster to attend the Festival of the Fields and to perhaps have a BBQ and a chance to pray together and discuss what we have been doing here tonight.

**Daingan, Rhode, Clonabullogue**

There will be a newsletter report about this meeting (using this document as a basis)

There will be response sheets for people to fill in to have their say on what we have been doing

Lay led liturgy will go ahead in one of the parishes

**Reflection on meeting:** Bishop Denis gave us some of his reflections from the meeting, saying that what stood out for him was that 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.

**Next Meeting: Mount St Anne’s on Tuesday 26th September at 7pm for tea and coffee, with the meeting beginning at 7.30pm**