**PUTTING OUT INTO DEEP WATER**

**8th June 2023 Tullow Parish Centre**

**PARISHES IN ATTENDANCE:**

Baltinglass, Rathvilly

Hacketstown, Clonmore

Tullow, Ballon

**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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| --- | --- | --- |
| We are in a new reality | We are a very large area to be cared for | Change can be positive and hopeful, or negative and frightening |
| Some of our parishes are already co-operating well | Will we still have Mass in every church? | Will people still go to Mass? |
| Will we retain our identity? | We need to be open to what needs to be done | We know change is coming |
| Might it be better to have two clusters here and not three | We need to get to know each other | Good for us to be united – no guilt about going to Mass in other parishes |

**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:

* A little help can save us – let us accept and receive
* If we feel that God is urging us to do something and we are brave, we won’t be disappointed
* Trust
* Go where Jesus points us
* Do not be afraid to ask for help
* If you say so (Jesus), I will do it
* Put out into the deep water
* Trust the process
* We are a piece of a jigsaw
* The results will be beyond our imagination
* There is abundance with God, accept the challenges
* God knows what God is doing, we don’t

**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?

* Be realistic about the future
* Compromise for unity
* Be fair for a sustainable future
* Mutual respect
* Support and consult
* Open to give and take, and hearing what others have to say
* Communicate far and wide
* Work together to retain our identity rather than be absorbed
* Be open to accepting the changes that are going to come
* Value and respect each other as we follow Christ
* Share the work

**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?

**Baltinglass, Rathvilly**

We have work to do to reinvigorate our own Parish Pastoral Councils

Once this work is done, we will call a meeting of the councils together

We will ensure that the existing co-operation is continued

A lay person will feed back to parish communities about what we did in this meeting

**Hacketstown, Clonmore**

The priests from Hacketstown and Clonmore will swap for one weekend and say Mass in the other parish

We will hold a joint Parish Pastoral Council meeting

We will include some news about the other parish in the newsletter

**Tullow, Ballon**

Have a discussion about how the new map of parishes came about so this discussion can be shared wider

Enlarge the map we have and share it across parishes, newsletters, church porches

Spread the word to people – not only those who are currently attending Mass

We will have a joint Parish Pastoral Council meeting between now and September

We will explore way to reach out to the general public and get their opinions

We will share a report of this meeting

**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 us not being disappointed if we do what God is urging us to do. He reflected that there are some concerns people have, particularly around loss of identity. He took heart from the comment that ‘God knows what God is doing’ and spoke positively of the co-operation that was already happening. He encouraged work to reinvigorate Parish Pastoral Councils.

**Next Meeting: Tullow Pastoral Centre on Monday 25th September at 7pm for tea and coffee, with the meeting beginning at 7.30pm**