

# ***Preparing the Way*** **Consultation Report**

**November 2015**

## **Introduction**



I need to register immediately my thanks for the great interest shown by so many priests, religious and people in the whole process of this Consultation. The breadth of comment and the reflection of the wealth of experience are making the whole process of consultation something dynamic and creative. People of all different ages and experience, from every corner of the Diocese and drawn from many different cultures and traditions, have spoken of the priorities and the challenges that face us and of their experience of Church and the celebration of Faith in their lives which will help to indicate the way ahead.

2,443 individual and group replies were received online and 1,150 individuals and groups submitted questionnaires by post. In addition to the completed questionnaires, over 100 e-mails were received and over 60 letters and documents of varying length. There have been many responses to the open invitation to comment on matters not specifically included in the questions of the Consultation and I am grateful for the ideas and observations they have contained.

As you are probably aware, when I was installed as Bishop of Salford last year, I asked everyone in the Diocese to adopt a simple prayer: "Stay with us, Lord, on our journey". I am so pleased that I made that invitation and all the more delighted by the response of people in schools and parishes, in homes and communities. The prayer is everywhere and remains, I believe, of singular importance if we are to chart the way ahead. If the Lord stays with us then we can be sure that we are going in the right direction, at the right speed. If the Lord is with us then we can also rely on the presence of the Holy Spirit to energise us and provide us with all that we need for each step along the way.

The consultation asked a series of questions. The consensus provided in the answers, on many subjects, allows me to make a number of decisions with great confidence that there is a general agreement and desire for certain things to be put in place. In fact, I can report that there is no question that did not receive a good level of consensus. In some cases, something might have been confirmed as desirable but there is some diversity of opinion about how it might best be

implemented and that will take some additional thought and work. Other matters will, of necessity, take time to implement and develop.

It is also true that, in just about every matter under consideration, there are some voices that are opposed to the majority. I do not intend to dismiss those voices and their opinions. It is important that we recognise that a consensus may give rise to a decision but we must do all we can to avoid people feeling alienated and angered by decisions that are made. Indeed, opposing voices may well bring important wisdom for consideration and help to refine our thinking and to be more aware of the impact of what we are doing.

As I begin this report, I want to assure you of my gratitude that you have responded so generously to this process, accepting that this is the right moment for a review of the life of the Church in this Diocese at a time when so much is changing around us in our increasingly cosmopolitan society, in an atmosphere of increasing secularisation and materialism. It is not a time, however, for despondency or gloom. The Church has always been challenged by the world in which it was planted by the Lord. Pope Francis shows us, in his teaching and manner of life, that challenge is good and full of hope – and the challenge is for all of us, every member of our Church. The recent Synod on the Family, in Rome, has also shown that there should be no fear of discussion as a means for discerning good pastoral practice as we draw on the wealth of experience and expertise.

## A Changing Church

I must step back for a moment from the questions of the Consultation to speak about the context in which we now find ourselves, as the Church in the Diocese of Salford. Manifestly, we live in a changing world and, while remaining true to the doctrines of the Church, we must adapt and be a changing Church.

We must plan for the future and, given the reduction in the number of priests available for pastoral ministry, the planning needs to be radical. At the present time there are 150 priests in active pastoral ministry (including 9 not in parish ministry and 11 outside of the Diocese). 23 of them are past the normal age of retirement (75) and there must be no question of preventing them from retiring when it is right for them to do so. By 2020 it is estimated that we shall have 108 priests (under 75 years of age) in pastoral ministry. We need to be careful to recognise that this is not an indication that the Church is falling apart and declining: the Church consists of the whole people of God. We benefitted for over fifty years from a very large and generous influx of priests from Ireland. Those priests are now either approaching retirement or have already retired. They are not being replaced. We are returning to the situation that existed in an earlier period of the history of this Diocese. We must rely on fewer priests and on sourcing future vocations at home. At present we have just eight men in formation for priesthood, with a significantly large group of enquirers.

The greatly increased number of priests in the 1970s and 1980s brought a confidence that those numbers would be maintained and it was reasonable at that time to create smaller parishes, sub-dividing larger ones and building new churches. In some urban areas of the Diocese churches are well within walking distance of one another. These many churches were well populated when they were built but the Catholic population has dispersed and declined and it must be acknowledged that there are many Catholics who do not now attend Mass and other church services. As a consequence, we have many churches with small communities that have become unviable in terms of outreach and apostolate and even in financial terms.

In the mid-1930's there were 149 parishes in the Diocese. This number rose to 202 in 1970 and 207 in 1980. We cannot hope to sustain that number today. I appreciate that people grow fond of their local church and indeed there are many Catholics attending the newer churches who were responsible for financing and building them. It will be very difficult, even emotionally demanding, to see some of these churches close – but some must be closed if we are to be serious in re-establishing ourselves as a missionary Church with “missionary parishes”.

We currently have 150 parishes. In order to realistically realign ourselves for the future, we must now look to reducing those 150 parishes to about 75 parishes. Given the geography of the Diocese and the Catholic population (both in terms of those who attend Mass and those who do not) 75 parishes will allow for a reasonable distribution of church buildings. It is possible to see some of those future parishes having more than one church, but probably no more than two churches. (In rural areas, there may be reason to cluster more than two churches within a parish). I have been the Bishop of this Diocese for nearly a year and I have been making my best effort to learn about the Diocese and to understand the history and the geography of the parishes. I have not learned nearly enough to know how to redraw the Diocese with just 75 parishes. I must rely on advice and the experience and knowledge of others. I would like to describe the process by which we may decide on our plan for the future.



It is evident that the priests of the Diocese have a wealth of knowledge about the parishes where they live out their ministry. Their wisdom and experience are essential as first steps in re-organising the parishes. To prepare them for that discussion, I am meeting with all the clergy of the Diocese in early February 2016 to brief them on the importance of their task. They must suggest to me the best way in which we may provide priestly ministry in and through parish life. I will be asking them to bring the views and experience of their parishioners to these planning meetings. Then, deanery by deanery, I will ask for a proposed plan of action. The priests of each deanery must decide which parishes will be what may be called “Mission Parishes” and will be the centres of our mission in the future. These “Mission Parishes” must depend on an increase in lay involvement about which I will be writing later in this report.

The priests may also suggest to me other churches that may remain as chapels within the “Mission Parishes” but will be unlikely to have a resident priest. Each of the “Mission Parishes” will be under the pastoral care of a Parish Priest, perhaps with an assistant. The parish community will need to organise itself, providing catechists, lay ministers and administrators who will help to run the parish and look after the church(es), as delegated by the Parish Priest who will provide for the sacramental needs of the parish.

The priests of the deanery must also decide which of the present parish churches and other churches and chapels are not viable and which must, in due course, be closed. I accept immediately that this will be a matter of great sadness to many people who will be asked to transfer their spiritual homes to other churches. This will also be a difficult moment for some priests who will have to come to the conclusion, in the deanery discussions, that even their own parishes must close – communities that they may have served for many years. For those churches which will close there will be further important decisions to be made. Are they to be sold or leased for

community projects or for trade or entertainment purposes? Would it be more reasonable for them to be demolished and the land used for more pressing needs, such as affordable housing?

The deliberations will need to include a range of considerations. Some of those elements will necessarily include the size of the congregation, its geographical spread, the provision of transportation and the proximity of parish schools. Different parishes will also have additional differing considerations such as the size of the church building and its condition. I appreciate that this will not be an easy discussion. Following their discussions, **I will be asking each deanery to provide a recommended plan for the future; a written submission of their proposals. I will then be asking a small group of people I believe to have good knowledge of the Diocese to consider each proposal objectively and to identify any particular difficulties which may require amendment, or to endorse the proposal.**

**The proposal will then be made known to the people of the deanery, with an opportunity to comment or to provide additional information which may affect a final decision. It will then be the responsibility of the Bishop to make the final decision and to plan the period of transition.** In most cases, the changes will not be implemented immediately but, having a definite plan, decisions can begin to be made about the appointment of priests and the internal organisation of each community. Plans can also be made about the future of buildings.

I can well understand that this will be a very difficult and emotional time for many people. I would wish that we could simply retain the configuration of parishes as we now have them. There is, I think, a growing realisation that there needs to be a considerable change and that we cannot continue as we are. If we do not have a firm and positive plan for the future then we are in real danger of our parishes becoming stagnant with little more than an ever decreasing celebration of the Sacraments. If there is no clear plan for consolidation and re-structuring then we will be doing ourselves a great dis-service and over time many of the present parishes will simply cease to function as priests retire from ministry and cannot be replaced. This would be in clear opposition to the urgent invitation of Pope Francis to create and energise missionary parishes for a changing Church in a changing world. I have no doubt that there is both the energy and the resource among the people of this Diocese to build missionary parishes which will speak loudly and clearly of our Gospel values to the society in which we live and sustain and encourage people in their faith.

This re-structuring cannot simply be a return to the use of the oldest churches and earliest created parishes of this Diocese. In each generation people move and some of our oldest churches are situated in town centres which have become de-populated as the towns have grown and developed, and new residential suburbs now house the large majority of our population.

It is certainly true that some people will have to travel further to their parish churches and integrate into communities that will be new to them. Perhaps a short description of a parish that I visited with CAFOD, during the summer, might help us all to keep our own difficulties in perspective.

I met Fr Paul at his parish in Zimbabwe, where he is the only priest. He took us into his spotlessly clean church and stood by three large picture frames, each containing fifteen photographs of different chapels. These are his forty five mission stations spread throughout his single parish; a parish as large as the whole of Salford Diocese. Some of the chapels were sturdy brick buildings; others simpler, with mud walls and thatched roofs. Given the distances, he can only manage to visit some of the more remote chapels every few months but they thrive on the generosity of the community

members who keep the places in good repair, and the people meet regularly for prayer and celebration. For some people the journey, even to their nearest mission station, requires a walk of several hours.

Many of our "Mission Parishes" will be no more than two or three miles apart and, even in 2020, we are likely to have some 108 priests (under 75) to serve a similar area to the parish described above where there is a single priest. There can be no question that we are facing a "shortage" of priests. Together with Poland and Malta we have the greatest ratio of priests to Catholic population in the world. At present we have one priest for every 1884 Catholics and by 2020 we are likely to have one priest for every 2620. We are facing the challenge of adjusting to having less priests than before but, in the eyes of the rest of the world it is certainly not a "shortage".

Bearing all this need for change in mind, let us return to the Consultation.



## Governance of the Diocese

The consultation questionnaire asked: Do you agree with the suggestion that we should appoint some lay diocesan trustees? 93.8% said that we should appoint lay trustees. I find that very encouraging and reassuring. In terms of Canon Law, Salford is "a particular Church" and we need always to have the first priority of preaching the Gospel and living the values of the Gospel as best we can. However, there is an important aspect of the Diocese of Salford Charitable Trust that must not be ignored. We must be aware of our responsibilities under Charity Law and Civil Law. We must manage our assets as best we can for the benefit of the mission of the Church. We must have expertise that will help us to develop the best of schools and institutions and be properly accountable for the responsibilities that we have. It seems to me to be very evident that we need lay expertise to assist us in the best management of the Diocese and in compliance with the demands of the law. **I shall be inviting lay people of diverse expertise to join the Board of Trustees before the end of this calendar year.**

The question: Would you agree that we ought to establish a Diocesan Pastoral Council? This also brought a resounding 96.5% approval. That speaks of a real sense of energy and willingness to share responsibility within the life of the Diocese. There is no doubt that the laity (the vast majority of the membership of the diocesan church) must have a voice with the priests and religious of the Diocese in the discernment of the needs of the local Church and the demands of the mission of the Church. Almost as strong (88.12%) was the approval of the suggestion that we should seek to establish a pastoral council in each of the eight deaneries from which membership of the diocesan pastoral council could be selected. That is also encouraging in the sense that the Diocesan Pastoral Council should not be seen as a single body trying to connect every part of the Diocese. Ideally, it could become

something of a parent body, being informed by the experience of the different deanery groups. It would seem best to begin with the creation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council and then to consider a second step at deanery level. This will allow for a time of adjustment in the deaneries to any new configuration of parishes.

The question of membership of these groups brought a degree of diverse opinion. How best should we determine the membership? Should there be a priest, a religious, a lay woman and lay man from each deanery? Should there be a specific requirement to have a young person from each deanery? Various combinations of membership were suggested.

Given the clear desire to have both a Diocesan Pastoral Council and Deanery Pastoral Councils, **I have decided to create both, and as a first step towards doing so to invite an independent lay person to consider the membership of such councils as they exist elsewhere and to make recommendations to me about a suitable composition for our own councils.**

## The Sacraments of Initiation: Age for Confirmation

Some twenty five years ago a brave and somewhat controversial decision was made to return to an ancient practice of celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation in a particular order. Children were to be baptised in infancy and be confirmed before their First Communion, usually at the age of seven years. In this way, the reception of Communion was seen to be the completion of the Sacraments of Initiation. For this practice to be effective, it was recognised that a strong emphasis would need to be placed on the nurturing of faith within the family, so that the child would grow in his or her practice and understanding of the faith through the example and encouragement of the whole family. It was a noble intention but experience shows that, in all too many cases, there has been little or no encouragement by parents and many children, confirmed at seven years of age, may have no further regular experience of faith within a parish context nor experience encouragement to grow in their faith at home.



The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has discussed the age of Confirmation and it is likely that the parameters for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation will be between 10 and 18 years. The practice in the Diocese of Salford must therefore change. There has been, and continues to be, a great deal of conversation about setting a new preferred age for Confirmation. 46.64% suggested the final year in primary school, 32.28% suggest 12-14 years, 11.34% suggest 14-16 years of age and 3.74% would prefer Confirmation during the Sixth Form.

Those who believe that children should be confirmed in the last year of primary school argue that the children then have a clearer sense of making a commitment in faith than at the age of seven. They also benefit from the parish preparation for the Sacrament being strengthened by the catechesis in the Catholic Primary Schools which most of our young candidates for Confirmation attend.

There are others who argue that Confirmation might be more valuably conferred at 14 or 15 years of age or later, when a young person is more likely to make a mature decision and recognise the obligations that are attached to such a commitment. These arguments are often countered by the belief that many young Catholics will have drifted away from any practice of their faith and many will no longer be in Catholic schools. There are arguments, too, that there is too much social peer

pressure at that age which will prevent young people from electing to prepare for the Sacrament.

Pope Francis upholds the urgency of ensuring that our young people complete the Sacraments of Initiation but he does not specify any particular order in which the Sacraments need to be received, nor at any specific age. The argument that we should confirm primary school children “before we lose them” can be countered by the belief that we do nothing to value the Sacrament by conferring it on children in their final year at primary school if they will never appreciate or understand what they have received.

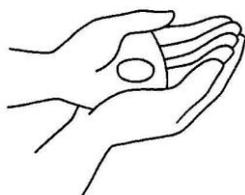
The practice in other Dioceses in England and Wales is mixed. My own experience has been to confirm young people at the age of 14 or 15 years. I have experienced groups that have clearly benefitted from the more sophisticated preparation which reflects their increasing maturity but it has also been clear that many others who had received their First Communion had drifted away and were not confirmed.

There remain a number of open questions, but having heard and reflected on the responses to the consultation the direction of travel is clear. We need to move to an older age, although at this stage I do not have a settled view as to what that age should be. My decision is, therefore, that we need time to consider this matter further. **I will be commissioning a small group of priests and people to investigate the resources being used elsewhere and to assist me in determining at what age we might deliver the best religious formation and how we may achieve a coherent and ongoing catechesis for the benefit of our young people.** I believe that the quality of the catechetical materials will be key in stimulating a growing commitment to Faith in our young people. I will ask this commission to report within twelve months so that, even if it is determined that Confirmation should be at the age of ten, there will be adequate time to circulate the new catechetical materials and train the catechists in the parishes for our first group of ten year olds seeking Confirmation, in 2018.

There is a small majority opinion (53.36%) that would prefer the Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation to be during the schools’ summer term. That would seem appropriate though it would not necessarily need to be the firm rule. It would mean that the preparation for the Sacrament could begin in September, with the start of the new academic year, and be contained within one school year. I would hope that the Bishop would be the ordinary minister of this Sacrament but that would mean drawing candidates together from more than one parish for some celebrations. There is also time to consider the form of the celebration and whether it be inserted into a Liturgy of the Word or during Mass.

## The Sacraments of Initiation: Age for Reconciliation and First Communion

65.89% of responses indicated that First Reconciliation and First Communion be retained for children in Year 3. Of the 34.11% of those preferring change there was no consensus as to a preferred age. There was a more or less equal division for each of 8 to 11 years. Most of the children in Year 3 are indeed 8 by the time they receive their First Holy Communion.



I would feel more comfortable about a child of seven or eight years having an initial understanding of the Eucharist as a spiritual food and something to be honoured as they gradually grow into the mystery of actually receiving The Body of Christ. This concept is rather more manageable for a child of seven or

eight years than the idea of the reception and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. Of course, First Communion should not be celebrated in isolation and children should be reminded frequently, preferably by their parents but also within the school context, of the privilege and importance of what they receive at Communion.

Since there is no major appetite for change and no apparent consensus for any other age, **I think it best to leave these two Sacraments in Year 3.** What needs to change, however, is the on-going catechesis that helps a young person to grow in the knowledge of and practice of these Sacraments. The formula learned for First Reconciliation, for example, is something that can easily become sterile and meaningless unless there is further discussion and catechesis so that the meaning of the Sacrament of Reconciliation can grow with the young person as a place of reflection on their relationship with God and with their neighbor, and their actions. Just so, the understanding of the Eucharist must develop and mature if there is to be a true devotion and valuing of what we receive.

## The Permanent Diaconate

90.18% of the responses were in favour of establishing the Permanent Diaconate in our Diocese. Salford Diocese is at present the only Diocese in England and Wales that does not have this ministry and it would seem reasonable that we should align ourselves with the practice in all the other dioceses. That said, there were some voices of caution and their comments are opinions to be welcomed. The Permanent Diaconate was introduced following the Second Vatican Council and there is no doubt that there have been fifty years of learning as the role of the Permanent Deacon has developed. Different dioceses have had different expectations and priorities and we, here in Salford, would do well to research the experience of other dioceses so that we may start with a clear understanding of what we would intend our Permanent Deacons to be and to do in their ministry for our local church.

Among the reservations expressed about the introduction of the Permanent Diaconate was that it could just be seen as introducing a new layer of clericalism in the Church at the very moment when we are trying to promote lay involvement and lay responsibility. It was also pointed out that there is nothing that a Permanent Deacon can do that the laity cannot already do, if commissioned.

From my perspective, I would feel that a ministry which is intended for the Universal Church should not be ignored in our own Diocese. Who knows how many men may feel called to this particular ministry? By introducing it I am not suggesting that every parish must aspire to having a deacon but there should be the scope of welcoming a person who feels called to this ministry and who undertakes formation to equip himself for it. It would seem very odd to me to accept that a person might feel called to this vocation in this Diocese but must then be sent to a neighbouring Diocese in order for that vocation to be further discerned and be formed for ministry.

There were some comments that the introduction of the Permanent Diaconate was a renewal of the promotion of a male dominated Church. Some were forceful in the request for a diaconal ministry that could be open to women and men. Such a decision is, of course, beyond the scope of our Consultation and would be a decision which would lie with the Pope in council with the bishops of the Church. I would like to register here, however, that there is most certainly a need not only to recognise the role and valued presence of women in the Church but to enhance it. It is clear and evident that women provide so much in the wider ministries of the Church and have always been an essential presence. I would go so far as to suggest that every man and woman in the Church would have been fundamentally influenced by the

faith and action of women of faith in their lives. As Pope Francis has said, we need to develop a more mature theology of women in the Church.

**I will be appointing a small team to establish a definition for what the Permanent Diaconate should be in the Diocese of Salford and to organise appropriate formation for those who present themselves and are considered suitable for diaconal formation.** It may be that the formation may be provided within the Diocese or it may be thought better to avail ourselves of diaconal formation which is being offered elsewhere. When these matters are in place, I shall feel confident in inviting people to pray for vocations to the Permanent Diaconate in the same way that we are urged to pray for vocations to priesthood and the religious life.

## The Changing Church: Lay Participation

If we are to succeed in building a missionary Church and missionary parishes, there is one crucial element that cannot be ignored or understated. We must build on the competency, skills and dedication of the lay faithful. We must constantly seek to ensure that a priest is free to do what he is ordained to do in sacramental and pastoral ministry. The priests of the Diocese must not be distracted by matters of financial administration, concerns for building maintenance and compliance. Too many priests spend too much time on matters much better left to the expertise of the laity. But the encouragement of lay participation and responsibility is not just to be seen as assisting priests. The Laity provide an essential contribution to the life of the Church which they bring through the use of their own gifts and talents in the practical expression of the Gospel in every aspect of daily life.

The Second Vatican Council spoke eloquently about the role of the laity in the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. The Decree does not compromise the role of the laity. It says, for example:

“As sharers in the role of Christ as priest, prophet and king, the laity have their work cut out for them in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is often unable to achieve its full effectiveness.” (AA10)

The role of the laity is not just to assist the priest within the confines of the parish community. The true apostolate of the laity is to bring the Christian spirit and the values of the Gospel into the wider community, thereby positively influencing its mentality, laws and customs. St Paul calls us “ambassadors for Christ”. That is, each and every one of us is delegated by Christ to stand in His place, with His authority and to carry on His work. The value and importance of the mission of the laity is not to be underestimated, nor can it be left undeveloped.

## The Training of Lay Volunteers: Diocesan Provision

To a very great extent, lay men and women have taken an increasingly visible and vital role in the building of the Church, most especially since the Second Vatican Council. However, it must not be assumed that a person can simply volunteer for a role in a parish and immediately begin the work. Some training and familiarization may be necessary. If we are to expect individuals to generously fulfil tasks then we must provide any necessary training and a place for the referral of difficulties that need to be resolved. There must be diocesan provision so that no-one is given a responsibility without a clear understanding of the task being undertaken and appropriate training and resource so that the task can be confidently completed.

A particular mention needs to be made here of the training of catechists and all those who take part in faith formation of others; such as those who kindly organize children's liturgies. The passing of our Faith to others is a first priority. We are all asked to live our faith and show by example what we believe but the catechists have a particular role in teaching and explaining our faith to the young and to those who, as adults, feel drawn to learn about our faith and embrace it for themselves. While much depends on the materials and resources that can be provided to assist catechists, training is of great importance if those resources are to be used for their maximum benefit. It is essential, therefore, that care is given to the training of catechists and all those who accompany the young people in their growing knowledge of Faith.

## **Parish Leadership Teams**

The Consultation asked if we should "look to establish a Parish Leadership Group" in each parish. Again the consensus was clear. 85.18% were in favour. And a resounding 72.04% thought that we should "seek to transfer the bulk of responsibility for parish administration from the clergy to the laity".

Parishes differ a great deal. Some urban parishes may have particular responsibilities for social projects or association with hospitals. Rural parishes may have priorities concerning ministry to a dispersed community. In order for the priest to be primarily concerned with pastoral ministry, each parish should create a "Leadership team" appropriate for its own needs. In every parish there would need to be a named Lead Catechist, Financial Administrator and a Safeguarding Officer. Larger parishes might usefully name other coordinators, but the "Leadership Team" should be kept to a small number. It is not intended to be a parish council.

As the "Mission Parishes" are named, I would ask that a "Leadership Team", appropriate for the administration of that particular parish, is named and details posted on noticeboards. It is important that such a team would, in an emergency, such as the illness or unplanned absence of the priest, take responsibility for alerting the Bishop's Office, arrange a supply priest and take responsibility for the opening and closing of the church and security of the buildings.

## **The Changing Church: Interfaith Dialogue and Ecumenism**

One of the profound changes in the last fifty years has been the new wave of migration. The urban areas of Manchester and its surrounds have always been subject to, and indeed depended upon, migration to fuel the economy with labourers and technicians. The most recent wave, however, has been different in that it has brought in migrants from further afield with their own traditions and cultures and diverse religious Faiths. While the largest group of recent migrants are Muslims, it should not be overlooked that the Islamic Faith has many different strands and traditions. Members of other Faiths, too, have arrived: Jains, Hindus, Buddhists.

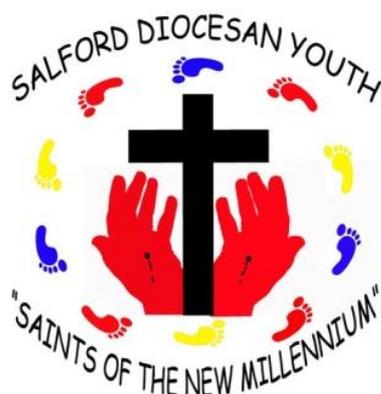
It is recognised that all the world's great religions actually hold many of the same values concerning the sanctity of life, the dignity of the human person, the value of the environment, to eradication of poverty and the pursuit of peace. Often these values are expressed in different ways but there is plenty of common ground. It is now vitally important that we are sure to welcome those who come among us, that we share our ideals and – most importantly – that we pursue the building of a peaceful society, having particular concern for the marginalised and those in need of care.

There are already many social projects directed and run by employees and volunteers of different Faiths. There is real success in working together. There is also a need for dialogue and understanding. In the same way, it is important that Christians of all denominations continue to work and pray together.

It would be unrealistic for me to intend to be present at all the various fora of discussion and celebrations of prayer. **It is my intention to build a group of people who will represent the Diocese and the Catholic Church in meetings with other Faiths and in local ecumenical gatherings.**

## A Parish and Youth Ministry Team

94.96% thought it appropriate to set up a diocesan team for youth ministry. The nurturing of our young people and their development in faith is clearly seen as a major priority by those responding to the Consultation. It is a regrettable truth that many of our young people are distancing themselves from any formal expression of their Faith, such as attendance at Mass and other religious services. At the same time, however, there is much energy displayed by young people in terms of their social concern and social action. The Caritas Ambassadors in our schools – now numbering some 212 – demonstrate an enthusiasm for projects concerning poverty and homelessness and also stimulate interest and energy in their fellow pupils. Pupil members of Chaplaincy Teams (approximately 1600) are also having an impact on schools with informal prayer groups and discussion groups and providing pastoral support to their peers. There is certainly no reason to believe that young people have no place in their lives for spirituality and Gospel action.



There are other groups, such as "Reignite", "Young Christian Workers" and "Night Fever" which engage young people's imagination and activity. Our annual diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes is supported by a large number of young people who volunteer to give of their time and energy to take care of the sick and less mobile pilgrims. Our diocese has been involved with World Youth Days from the beginning – and always with a good response.

Parish youth groups were much more common in decades past. One clear benefit of forming fewer, larger "Mission Parishes" will be the possibility of renewing youth groups.

A Youth Ministry Team would, hopefully, be able to network the various initiatives that already exist, sharing the best practice. It could also invest in new initiatives, drawing on the experience of other Youth Teams in other Dioceses.

But it would be wrong to isolate our initiatives for the youth from the essential centre of our religious experience which is the parish. Pope Francis is urgent in his request for a missionary spirit in our parishes and we must see our communities as cohesive and integrated. There are certainly activities that may be organised specifically for our young people but we should not think of youth work as being in any way separate from the rest of our parish community.

**It is my intention to appoint one or two priests to oversee the development of missionary parishes in which a youth ministry must have a particular priority.** This project must also, of course, connect with our schools so that the trinity of "Family, Parish and School" may be a unity of common evangelisation.

## Chaplaincies

Reducing the number of parishes to an optimal figure of 75 will also allow some flexibility for chaplaincy work. It is central to the pastoral ministry of any priest that he give time to the sick and, where required, to prisoners and other groups of particular need. Priests must also give time to school chaplaincy and to chaplaincy work, either full or part time, to our many universities and colleges.

While lay chaplains are to be valued in prisons, hospitals and schools, there is a need for priests to be available, especially for sacramental ministry. In some cases, this cannot simply be an aspect of ministry included in the portfolio of ministries within parish ministry. Some priests need to be fully available for chaplaincy work. These ministries lie at the heart of our service of the Gospel.

## Vocations

There were a series of questions about "Vocations". Just 25.53% of people responding said that they had given thought to a vocation to priesthood or religious life for themselves. 74.47% had not done so. Just 14.94% of people had suggested directly to another person that they might seriously consider priesthood or religious life. Some people wondered why we had included these questions or thought that this was too personal an area to raise in this questionnaire. However, the intention behind these questions was not to be intrusive but to get some measure of the extent to which people reflect on vocation for themselves and whether people are prepared to provoke discussion of the possibility with others.

We need, I think, to cultivate a "Culture of Vocation". God no doubt calls those whom He wishes to priesthood and religious life. Indeed, God calls people to many other vocations, particularly to marriage and indeed to the single life. There lies with us all a responsibility to ensure that those whom God calls should be alerted to hearing that call and to nurture, rather than ignore, it. It is important that young people especially should ask themselves the question "What is God asking of me?" And this is not a question to be asked just once by young people but should be repeated as they grow and mature. The question should not simply be addressed at school but also within the context of family, where parents are the first and best teachers of their children in the ways of faith. The question should not be asked in isolation but within a context of understanding the ministry of the priest and the purpose of religious life. If spoken about merely in isolation then any reply will not be informed.

We need also to speak of vocation in the wider sense as understood by Blessed John Henry Newman who promotes the belief that everyone is created for a "definite purpose" and we all must seek to discover that purpose for ourselves.

It is certainly possible to develop a sense of discovering our vocation in our schools but it cannot be solely there that such discussions are encouraged. Work is already being done to provide a better priority for the promotion of vocation but I would urge everyone to consider how each one of us may better promote that sense of discovering what God may be asking of us.

There are suggestions that, faced with a declining number of priests, we should look to import priests from elsewhere. While there should be no objection to having some priests from abroad and valuing the generosity of them being here, there are two particular reasons why this should not be seen as a resolution to the "shortage" of priests in the Diocese. The main reason is that, although many countries currently enjoy a very large number of vocations, they are growing churches in their own right and the proportion of priests to people is still far lower than in England and Wales.

(Indeed, after Malta, we still have the highest ratio of priests to people in the world). It would be quite wrong, in my view, to draw priests away from their own national churches where there is an even greater need of them. It is worthwhile thinking of the situation of Fr Paul in Zimbabwe who was mentioned earlier.

Secondly, it is not necessarily healthy to bring priests from other cultures and traditions and expect them to suddenly assimilate to our own national culture. This is best done when a priest comes from abroad and lives in community with other priests. That is not easy to arrange in our own situation where it is very unusual to find even two priests living in the same presbytery.

One arrangement could be mutually beneficial and some bishops in other countries are actively considering an agreement with this Diocese. The arrangement would be to send one or two priests to this Diocese for a fixed period of, say, three years during which time the priest could have a pastoral experience and perhaps undertake some studies. Those priests would understand the temporary nature of their appointment here and would return to their own dioceses, perhaps to be replaced by others on the same terms. The arrangement would remain strictly between the bishops concerned.

We must also acknowledge the important pastoral work of the ethnic chaplains; those priests who minister here to their own national communities, assisting many of the more recently arrived to find encouragement in their familiar style of liturgy and worship.

## Our Catholic Schools

Our 208 schools and colleges are a wonderful legacy of the energy and enthusiasm of past generations. They are also an inestimable asset for the Catholic Church in Salford for the future. We should be very proud of them. It was the generosity of past generations that wished to provide Catholic education for all Catholic children. It is right that that should remain a priority. There are, however, some complications. In some of our schools the school roll has seen the rise of pupils of other Faiths, noticeably Islam. Some schools, indeed, have only a minority of Catholic pupils. There was some question that we might hand over such schools to other education trusts.

However, there is real purpose in retaining such schools. We should welcome pupils into our schools where parents deliberately choose Catholic education and the Catholic ethos of education, even when they are of a different Faith. It has long been the tradition of the Catholic Church to provide education to all-comers, especially when in missionary territories the Church has opened the first schools in some of the world's poorest countries.

Nor should we ignore a plea of the Second Vatican Council, in the Decree on Education (*Gravissimum Educationis* n.9): "This Sacred Council of the Church earnestly entreats pastors and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools fulfill their function in a continually more perfect way, and especially in caring for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or who are strangers to the gift of Faith".

Matters of Education feature frequently in Government legislation and there are continual changes and new requirements and regulations. We must be very vigilant in protecting the heritage of our Catholic schools and, while necessarily complying with all legislation, we must voice our concerns when our mission in education appears threatened or compromised by external influence.

## Wardley Hall

The question asked was “Would you be happy for further investment to be made so that Wardley Hall (and adjacent buildings) can be open to greater usage by priests and people of the diocese? 82.05% were in favour.

Wardley Hall was actually purchased by the Diocese in 1930 not merely as a home for the Bishop, but as part of a larger, and necessary purchase to create a new cemetery, now of course St Mary’s RC Cemetery, adjacent to the Hall itself. That obligation and facility for our Roman Catholic Community still exists and thrives to this day.



There are various aspects to any consideration of Wardley Hall. In the first place, if we are to retain the Hall then we must take responsibility for a building which is now five hundred years old. It is referred to, in historical research, as one of the finest of the minor halls in Lancashire. Such buildings need an ongoing programme of maintenance and repair. Whether we consider expanding its use or not, we are responsible for the building’s good repair and that is, in itself, costly.

The Hall is not just a building of historic interest. The presence of a major relic, the skull of St Ambrose Barlow, and the Catholic associations with the building over centuries make it a place of religious significance and, indeed, a place of pilgrimage. Added to that is the need for us to maintain the sacred nature of our Cemetery for our families and their deceased loved ones

Given the proximity of the stables and the gatehouse, there are opportunities to create better facilities for the welcoming of visitors and the accommodation of small meetings and conferences. With some adaptation, there could be accommodation for people to make retreats or to gather for days of recollection. The refurbishment of these buildings would be costly but some money will have to be spent anyway, just to avoid their further decline to dereliction. Money can be found for this refurbishment and development. It should be stressed immediately that no money accrued from the closure or sale of any church will be used to improve facilities at Wardley Hall. If there are closures of churches or the sale of presbyteries, the money from such sales will be held by the parish in which those buildings are situated.

Any project to develop Wardley Hall will need to be managed in stages and will take some time to complete. It will be important to have an understanding and agreement of the full project before any work is done so as to avoid any duplication or unnecessary work.

Individual comments from the consultation also speak of the desirability that the bishop should reside at Wardley Hall. For the time being, at least, I would not want to contest that wish, which is expressed by both priests and people. It would be important for me that I should not reside there in any sense of isolation. I would hope that there may be opportunities to welcome a small community, religious or lay, or that there would be regular visitors and guests. It would not be appropriate to think of the building being the residence of just one or two people.

## The Changing Church: A Development Plan

I have described above the plan for the realignment of parishes. This is clearly the foundation for the future development of the Diocese. But all aspects of Diocesan Life need to be considered as part of the whole picture. The assuming of much administration and diverse ministries by the laity is vital for the progress of the parishes, just as the work of the Trustee Board will guide decisions of governance and legal compliance. The establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council will also assist in giving a pastoral direction to the life of the Diocese. The introduction of the permanent Diaconate will strengthen our sacramental ministry.

While individual parishes will have their own particular character and priorities it is essential that we have a common missionary model that binds us together as Church. We must be listening to one another so as to benefit from shared initiatives and pastoral practice. There must be a keen sense of working together to achieve the best possible results.

It is important, then, that we have a Development Plan which is constantly revisited and, where necessary, revised and updated. Statements about the Development Plan should be readily available on the Diocesan website.

Information is important. If the Diocese is to work as one Church in mission then the clergy, religious and people of the Diocese should have access to information concerning the life of the Diocese. **There will be an annual report on the state of the Diocese with a financial statement.**

## Essential Initiatives already being Developed

It is appropriate that I give an account here of four initiatives upon which I have already taken action. Each seemed to me to be both obvious and essential for the good working of the Diocese.

In the first place I convened the **Clergy Welfare Committee**. From both a pastoral and medical point of view it is essential that we care for those priests who become ill and for the priests who retire from ministry. Having given their lives to priestly ministry and often only retiring at the age of 75 years or more, they must be assured of appropriate housing and medical care. It is also important that they should still feel in contact with their Diocese even though they may have opted to live outside the Diocese in their retirement. The Welfare Committee has a dual function. In the first place, priest members of the committee maintain personal contact with all the retired priests and, where feasible, visit them. These priests are able to report any particular needs and can assist in determining the time when a priest might need assistance in his living conditions, or nursing care. The other function of the medically trained members of the Welfare Committee is to assist in ensuring that a sick or retired priest is obtaining the best medical care and access to appropriate housing and accommodation. I am most grateful for the work already done by this new Committee and the generosity of its members. Of course, many priests will have family members and even their own home when they retire but the Committee ensures that no-one in need at that stage of their lives is left without recourse to assistance.

It also seemed essential to form a **Diocesan Property Committee**. The Diocese has a considerable amount of property which is, of course, a great asset. That asset easily becomes a liability if not properly maintained and used. It became clear that, due to the past closure of some parishes, there were a number of buildings left vacant. It is important that our premises are used, whether to meet our own needs or by leasing to others. The Diocesan Property Committee has the task of making an

audit of all the premises that we have and to ensure that there is proper maintenance and contracts for occupancy and usage. In due course, the Committee will oversee building and repair projects in the parishes and will also be able to oversee any sales or future purchases. These matters are, again, best left in the management and expertise of the lay faithful, leaving priests to concentrate on their priestly and pastoral ministries.

We live in an age of communication and information. We also preach a Gospel message as the root and foundation of our evangelisation. It is essential, therefore, that we give careful attention to communications. A new **Communications Office** is in the process of being set up at Cathedral Centre. This Office will be responsible for keeping the Diocesan website up to date. It will be a channel for news both within the Diocese and beyond. It will provide news items about the life of the Church and the Diocese.

Salford diocese has benefitted greatly from the presence and apostolate of numerous religious congregations. Their work still continues in many of our parishes. It is important that there be appropriate pastoral care for the religious and a firm bond with the Diocese. I have appointed a small team to provide care and assistance and to keep me informed of any concerns. The three **Vicars for Religious** are themselves members of religious congregations.

## The Organigram

The consensus expressed in the Consultation allows me to immediately make a number of decisions about our sacramental life, pastoral life and the administration of the Diocese (whilst, as noted earlier, other matters require further consideration). Over the past few months I have been thinking about the structure that we need at the centre of the Diocese in order to enable us to be the “Missionary Disciples” that Pope Francis invites us to be. The diagram at the end of this report shows that structure, refined through initial discussion with the priests and in light of the outcome of the Consultation.

I have also been able to ask some priests and people to take up various positions of responsibility in the Diocese; some being confirmed in positions they already held and others starting afresh. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who held various posts during this last year and carried out responsibilities with which they had been entrusted by my predecessor, Bishop Terence. That continuity in this my first year has been invaluable to me.

At this point, it is sufficient to name only the two Vicars General, Mgr Anthony Kay (Moderator of the Curia) and Canon Michael Cooke (Evangelisation) and the five Episcopal Vicars: Canon Paul Brindle (Care of Clergy), Fr Paul Daly (Formation), Canon Anthony McBride (Education), Fr Peter Hopkinson (Dialogue) and Fr David Glover (Caritas). Each of them will lead teams of clergy and lay people who will be responsible for the developing mission of our Diocese for evangelisation and social outreach.

The diagram shows the Curia and Administration aspects of the Diocese on the left (overseen by Mgr Anthony Kay) and the Evangelisation and Mission aspects on the right (overseen by Canon Michael Cooke). Clearly, the administration must work in service of the mission of the Church and the mission be accountable to the administration. Collaboration is a key word and the Vicars General and Episcopal Vicars will ensure that this is in place across all aspects of Diocesan life.

At the top of the diagram there are the various consultative bodies and the Trustees.

The Clergy and the Religious are an important resource and so they feature at the centre of the diagram under the care of myself, the Vicars General, the Episcopal Vicar for Clergy and the Vicars for Religious.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the Consultation was to gain the opinions of as many people as wished to be involved and to begin to set the direction for the development of the Diocese of Salford for the next generation. I believe that it has achieved its purpose. The consensus on all questions has been a common discernment. There is now much work to be done so that we can achieve those things which are considered desirable, indeed vital, for our well-being and our further development as a missionary diocese.

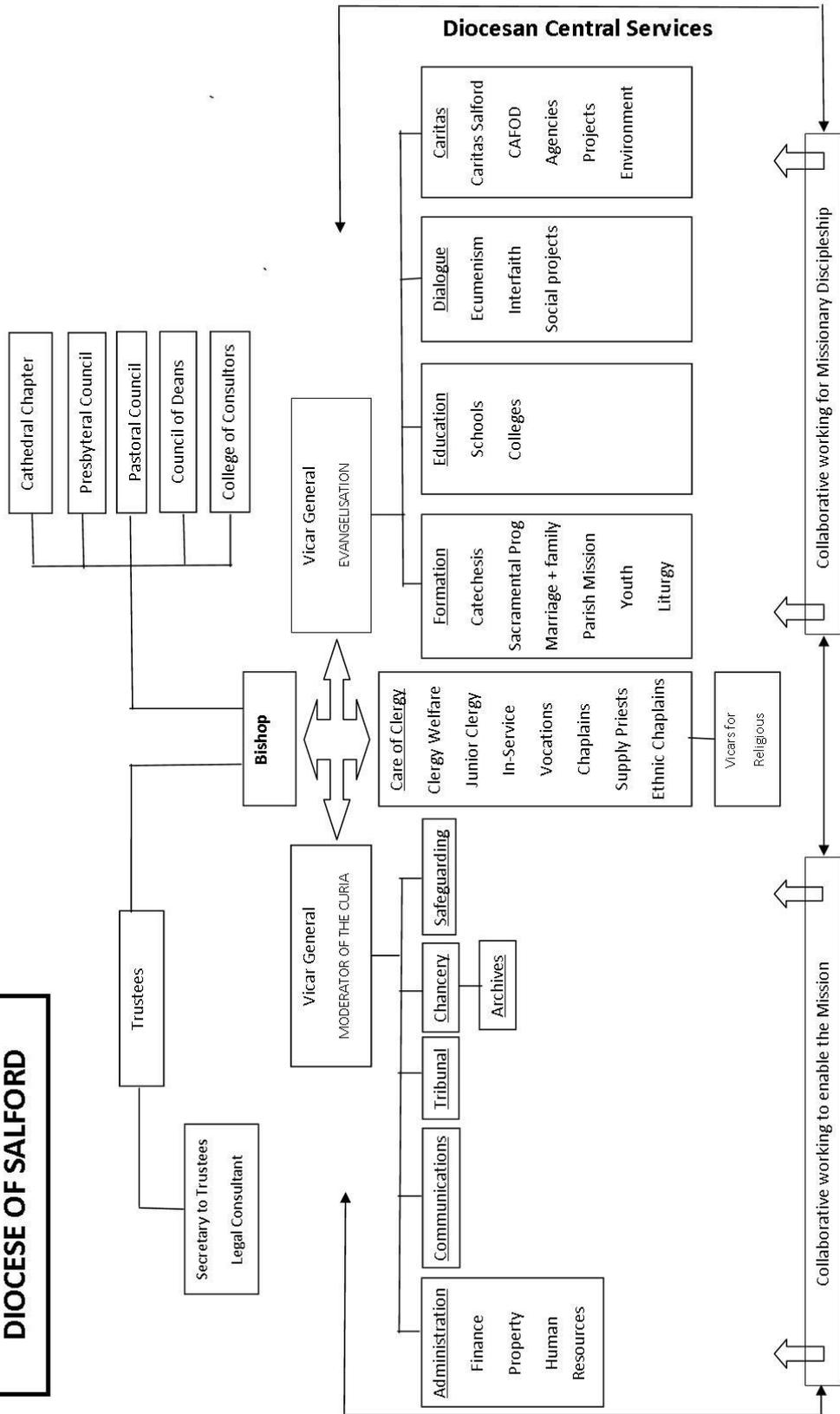
As I close this report, I would ask you to continue to use that prayer “Stay with us, Lord, on our journey” as our common petition to the Lord, so that His Will may be done in all things and that we may be his ambassadors in all that we are about in His name.

May God bless you and your families. May we all be generous in embracing change and sensitive to one another as we take the next step of that journey together with the Lord.

+John  
Bishop of Salford  
November 2015



# DIOCESE OF SALFORD



*Stay with us, Lord, on our journey*

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