

# You are Living Stones

Update—Lent 2013

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## Why *You are Living Stones*?

As Bishop Malcolm reminded us when we began this consultation, we are *all* living stones; each and every Catholic—priests, deacons, religious & parishioners—has a part to play in the Church's **prophetic mission** by proclaiming the Word of God, **priestly mission** by celebrating the liturgy & the sacraments, and **kingly mission** by serving their brothers & sisters in the community in which they live. *You are Living Stones* has helped us to reflect on how we do this as the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Nottingham—and how every parishioner in every parish has their role to play in this.

## The key themes:

There have been two key themes which have guided the consultation:

- **Organic Development:** Development is always best when it is not forced from above, but when it comes naturally over time by people working together and growing in communion with one another.
- **Co-responsibility:** we all have an active part to play in preparing for the future, sharing our gifts and talents to build up the Body of Christ, and not simply waiting to be told what to do by the Bishop or parish priest.

## The Consultation:

*You are Living Stones* has involved discussions, debate and the sharing of hopes and fears for the future in every parish and deanery. These discussions have been focussed not just on enabling the Bishop's Council to prepare for the future, but on helping priests, deacons and parishioners to understand their roles better and to share their many gifts with one another. Based on the submissions from the deaneries, the Bishop's Council prepared some proposals, **suggestions** as to how the Diocese may look in the future. The Bishop presented these proposals to the priests of the Diocese at a meeting on Monday 18th February; his presentation was followed by a discussion among the priests on a deanery basis, which was then fed back to the wider meeting. The meeting was positive in spirit and outlook. The text of the Bishop's presentation, together with the proposals and other documents, are available on the diocesan website ([www.nottingham-diocese.org.uk](http://www.nottingham-diocese.org.uk)) or from your parish priest.

## What happens next?

Throughout the consultation, Bishop Malcolm has been keen for everyone to have an equal voice in preparing for our common future—that is why *You are Living Stones* has been going on for some time. The proposals which were presented to your priests on 18th February will now form the basis of further discussions at personal, parish, deanery and diocesan level:

- At a **personal level**, you will be able to read, think and—most importantly—pray about Bishop Malcolm's presentation and the suggestions which have been put forward by the Bishop's Council.
- At a **parish level**, your parish priest will be able to tell you in what form the consultation will take in your parish—meeting, questionnaire or informal discussions.
- At a **deanery level**, your parish priest will be able to give you details of an open deanery meeting which Bishop Malcolm has asked every dean to hold during the next few weeks. The deans will report the outcome of this meeting to Bishop Malcolm.
- At a **diocesan level**, Bishop Malcolm has asked five deans—Father Paul Chipchase, Father Stephen Dye, Father Michael O'Donoghue, Canon Colin Taylor & Father Philip Ziomek—to help him to assess the feedback from the consultation and to advise him about the implementation, or otherwise, of the proposals which have been suggested.



**RENEWAL**



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## Things to think about:

- **Our current parochial structure:** Each parish is a community of believers with its own parish priest, even if it shares him with another parish. We currently have 108 parishes, 150 places of worship, 85 maintained schools, 94 diocesan priests in active ministry, 15 priests from other dioceses & the Ordinariate, and 41 active deacons. Ten parishes are cared for by religious priests. Each parish will always have a parish priest, even if he doesn't actually live in that parish.
- **Parishes will have to work together:** Neighbouring parishes will be called upon to support each other and share their catechetical, liturgical and social life, even if they are not formally linked with another parish.
- **Fewer parishes will have a resident priest:** A parish may have to share its parish priest with another parish, and work together under his pastoral care; this is already happening in some places in our Diocese. Such an arrangement will mean a bit of give and take in both parishes, not least because it is unrealistic to expect a parish priest to do everything in one parish and again in another. Which parishes are linked together will depend on a number of factors, including geography and viability.
- **Parishes may merge together:** After a time of supporting each other and sharing resources, parishes may well merge together and form one new community. This does not mean that their churches will have to close, but it will call for a new way of working together for the common good.
- **Parishes will have to think about what happens elsewhere in the Diocese:** It is difficult to draw a balance between larger rural parishes with relatively fewer parishioners and smaller urban parishes with a relatively high number of parishioners. When thinking about the proposals, it is important to think about how what we want for our parish will affect other parishes.
- **There will be fewer celebrations of Mass:** At the moment, the number of Masses being celebrated does not reflect the changing demography of Catholic life; an average of 110 people attends each of the 292 Masses celebrated in our Diocese each Sunday. As priests take on different responsibilities, Mass times will have to change—but we will do our best to guarantee at least one celebration of Mass on Sundays in each of our churches.
- **The role that each of us plays:** Parishes do not exist in abstract, but are real, live faith-filled communities. We each have to ask what we can do to build up the life of our parish community—and to reach out to our neighbouring parish communities. We have to respect each other's point of view, and think about the common good and not just about what we might prefer.

## Finally...

No decisions have been taken at all as to which parishes should retain their current structure, or which should be linked with another parish. All parishes will have to change, because all of us have to prepare for a very different future. We are being called to:

- Be realistic – there is no point our saying, 'If only,' or 'In an ideal world'. There never has been an ideal world, and never will be. We need to be rooted in reality;
- Be practical – just as a good gardener prunes his plants to make them grow, we too may need to prune our plant to lead to new growth. As Christ himself said, 'Unless a grain of wheat shall fall upon the ground and die, it will remain a single grain' (Jn 12:24); and
- Be faith-filled – we pray for the Church, but we don't worry about her – 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Mt 16:18). If we truly believe that Christ has died, risen and will come again, we can place our hope in him—he will guide our way.

By praying, thinking, reflecting and discerning, and with goodwill on all our parts, we will ensure that our parochial structures are renewed so that we can all engage in the Church's prophetic, priestly and kingly mission and play our rightful part in the life of the Church.



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