

EMBRACING CHANGE – SAINT MARY’S DEANERY

Deanery Meeting in Saint Matthew’s Academy, Saltcoats on 29 June 2014

205 Parishioners from 12 Parishes and 8 Priests attended the Deanery event in Saint Mathew’s Academy. A breakdown of the numbers attending from each Parish is attached as Appendix 1. The following is a record of the feedback from the group work. Most groups made comments on questions 1 and 2 and noted their concerns and hopes.

Introduction by Canon Matt McManus

I have had the opportunity, and I am grateful for it, to speak to a fair number of people from various Parishes in the Deanery over the last few weeks - people who have read the notes which came from the meetings the Deanery priests have had since the beginning of the year or were at the Pentecost Service. There was appreciation of the work that was put in – “It must have been hard going.” people said. It was and is but the single most frequent comment was “We can’t go on like this.”

How did the community of people founded by Jesus to bring light to the world – a community proud to be built on the faith of Peter, a repentant betrayer, and on the labours of Paul, a converted persecutor - end up as a Church which takes refuge in rules and seems to scramble to protect its own as if that was the only existence it could have?

In the tragedy of the abuse of the vulnerable, not just children but also people who have made mistakes, for example, in whom they married, or who have been victims of desertion or who have had bad experiences of the Church, we appear to have built an Empire of protecting the institution from scandal or indeed from the world in which we all live.

Could we be like the fish stranded in an ever-decreasing pond fighting to protect our very survival instead of escaping into the river and following our Master and spreading his teachings by the example of our lives as did Saints Peter and Paul?

Pope Francis has perhaps ignited the spark which we have a responsibility to fan into a flame – the flame of a new Pentecost - a new model of our Church at peace with itself and with the world. He goes on challenging us.

We, the priests who serve you, have clearly recognised – as all of you must surely recognise – that our structures, on which we have so long depended, are showing distinct signs that they need to change. The aspirations of Vatican Two need to be expanded further than we have already gone. We all know that in a short time there won’t be a Church within easy walking distance for everyone or a priest available 24/7 but there will be a Church and a Priest so that Mass is offered, the Word of God proclaimed, the Eucharist which is the necessary food of the journey is made available to all, those in need receive the Sacrament of the sick and sins absolved. For these Sacramental actions, priests were called by Jesus and ordained - and they are the essential business of our Church.

Our community needs Baptism – because we believe that is what Jesus gave us as the sign our belonging. It is surely no coincidence the Baptism can be administered without a priest. We must bury our dead – but that does not need a priest either. The custom in many parts of America and elsewhere in the world is for the community and its Priest to gather at some convenient time to offer Holy Mass for the brother or sister who has died – sometimes many days or weeks after the burial or cremation. In the Sacrament of Marriage, the couple

marrying each other are the ministers of the Sacrament: the Priest is but the witness of the Church but it could be a deacon or some other official witness. Most of our Parishes have a lay administrator for routine but necessary tasks. They are generally better at them than Priests are.

So, there are different, and perhaps better, ways of doing things. We need to explore them and eventually embrace them.

If fewer Priests mean more people to build up the Church then perhaps the message could not be clearer. Jesus instituted a Church with servants: bishops and priests – and without them we are no Church. But if servants become masters, how can we feel that we are on the right road?

Changing the structures will not be easy but God might be telling us that it is necessary – and perhaps giving us very clear signs. It could well be that we have been getting in His way by our antics and now is the favourable time. This is the day of Salvation.

We, the Priests of the Deanery, have come a long way in a short time - perhaps not yet far enough. We are well aware of the reality that we will need to do things differently and change some attitudes that have been around for a long time. We have been doing our best to follow a programme to help us see more clearly what is needed. Paul and David have been invited to share the programme with you. There will be work involved and it is not possible for everyone to take part in the first round of training - but it is a start and we pray it will spread out to everyone. Mother Church needs your help because change in us Priests is not enough. Today, we might hear a few suggestions and new ideas. Today all of us might be challenged.

During Lent and on Pentecost Sunday, we made a few formal opportunities for prayer but we have also pleaded with you to pray and go on praying that we – every one of us, priests and people – will have the courage we need to reshape our Church, making it fit for the twenty-first century but more exactly a Church enlivened by the Spirit and true to the call of Jesus to change the world.

We are on a journey - come with us.

Notes from the Meeting

Question 1 Discuss what you have heard this morning about the Three Horizons process as a way of discerning together a way forward for the Church in our Deanery.

- Priests want to move forward.
- Unnecessary detail - some people overwhelmed by detail.
- Yes. Happy with the process of Three Horizons. Nearly understand it.
- Can't carry on as it is.
- Need some form of process to move forward.
- People happy that this is a good process.
- Good starting point.
- Reflected in past – good.
- Lack of information - Priests communication to Parish.
- Not everyone has access to internet to print out.
- Surprised at scope of Three Horizons. How much can we do - lack of influence.
- What happens if Priests move on?
- Reiterates the need for Catholic schools.
- Feeling it was a good structure and process to work from.
- Not really clear on the Second Horizon. Good support document.
- There is a feeling that it is too much to take in in such a short space of time.
- There is concern that we are losing too many of the young community.
- Maybe we are still behind where we ought to be.
- We agree that everyone has a role to play and welcome the increase in recognition of this.
- Togetherness - Christ at the centre of the process.
- Too much information and jargon - feudalism, clericalism, authenticity. We as a group want to move forward, engage with young people, make faith central to their young lives. What do the young people want?
- Important we have a format.
- Is it a business procedure? It's a practical example. A framework positive. A good basis for discussion.
- Clear presentation - still don't understand the Three Horizons programme. Need more knowledge.
- Effective process.
- Proactive preparation - rather than reactive.
- Realistic.
- Consulting and involving laity.
- Excitement - things are happening.
- Not often asked!
- Looking for involvement.
- Hopeful and brave of Priests - should be commended for this.
- Broad picture was difficult to follow. Was an overview covering good and bad ideas.
- Distilling it to half an hour was difficult to convey to large group.
- Where are we in the process? Could follow analogy of Three Horizons. Hard to now think for ourselves. Brought up not to query.
- Present model not sustainable - things have to change.
- Will we get feedback from questionnaire?

Question 2 From what you have heard so far do you think engaging in the Three Horizons process on 7 September as Priests and lay people together will help us to discern a hopeful way forward for the Catholic Church in the North Ayrshire Deanery.

- Yes. We have to be prepared to discuss lay people and Priests together. To hear each other's experience and opinions.
- Concern: how do you choose ten people for 7 September? What if more want to attend? How do you make sure their views represent everyone?
- Supportive of Three Horizons process and are hopeful of this.
- Yes
- Need to encourage the young from start. 7 September after school start. School Inform schoolchildren?
- If young people think that the Church – as in this process – is wanting to be working in the present day they will be encouraged to be involved.
- Engagement between Priests and lay people should be of benefit.
- The feeling is more time is required in each Parish to meet more before 7 September.
- The process is a bit 'Americanised'.
- This is a good start, talking and opening up, sadly lack of young people from the Deanery. How can we get them involved in the process to hear their voices because they are the future of the Church?
- Priests need our support.
- Cooperation and discussion required before 7 September so that people fully understand.
- Allow 7 September to be more purposeful.
- Don't think it would be particularly useful to lay people.
- Yes. It has to be beneficial and positive.
- Method of selection from Parish - how do they decide this?
- Will this be open?
- Practical and positive outcomes to the discussions. Should there be individual reports to individual Parishes by people attending here? Is it only going to be online?
- Representative: Saint Peters; St Mary's, Largs; St Mary's, Irvine; Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Beith; St Winin's, Kilwinning.
- They have the potential to succeed.
- Will depend on how it is managed.
- Have no alternative, must go along with it.
- Sense of belonging. Good to feel opinion matters and will be listened to.
- Priests need to show they are behind it.
- Older Priests must be challenged by idea of change.
- Unfair to burden young Priests.

Concerns

- Lack of community.
- Not outward looking.
- Youth problems.
- Adult education lacking.
- What the laity are going to be asked to do.
- The Sacraments - rules and who officiates at Sacraments.
- Not enough Priests.
- Not enough congregation.
- People frightened of change.
- Lack of meaning of life being made clear to Parish members
- Priests v Laity - How do we work together?
- Faith not nurtured enough.
- Closed Church - are we welcoming? Can the Church be seen as too judgemental or building barriers?
- Need honesty. What is wrong? Admit who we are.
- What do young people need? Ask young people these questions.
- Falling attendances, particularly young.
- Supporting the Priests
- More 'normal' approach to defending the Church from attack.
- Age of clergy. Active laity.
- Divorced or gay or lapsed or marginalised can't go to Sacraments.
- Laws rather than Jesus works.
- Closure of Parishes.
- Loss of membership due to closure of Parishes.
- Attendance at Church by young people.
- Lack of congregational vibrancy.
- Not reaching out to all ages. Gap between provision for young before First Communion and afterwards.
- Not enough scripture teaching.
- People have been 'Sacramentalised but not evangelised'.
- Closing Churches.
- A lack of young people involved - today is an example.
- From our past experiences it may be a 'done deal' already.
- Are we going to keep our Church?
- How are we going to engage the youth?
- Lack of vocations and Bishops are out of touch with laity.
- Not appealing to young people. Not relevant to modern society.
- Woman's role.
- How we should stand up against modern issues, for example, same sex marriages and contraception?
- There is a level of hostility towards even answering these questions.
- This is not unanimous.
- An increase in vocations is obviously a priority.
- Exclusion of the Sacraments – divorcee.
- We need the young involved.
- Where are the future Priests going to come from?
- Finances to accommodate change?
- Ignorance as far as duties of alternatives to Priests.
- Need for more deacons - encouragement for increase.
- Women deacons - are there any existing?
- Women Priests.
- Language - especially for young people - make more accessible.

- Very often depends on who is saying Mass or giving homily as to how meaningful and how easy to understand what is being said.
- Opening doors and attitudes to welcome everyone - young people, poor et cetera.
- Better instruction in all aspects of Faith and Sacraments.
- Lack of Priests.
- Shortage of Priests - cost of education.
- Need for further humanisms.
- Lack of parents - not attending Mass.
- Engaging young people - the future. Perhaps a separate group for them engaging the primary and secondary schools.
- Priests and laity to engage with young people
- Financial. Buildings. Age is older. Locations. Church sharing across denominations.
- Taking people with you will be difficult.
- Elderly Bishop a problem - a ship without a captain.
- Time to move on. Need greater uniformity. Some Churches closed all day.
- No laity led Eucharistic services allowed.
- Cynicism that clergy already know how they'd like to proceed.

Hopes

- Creating a community spirit.
- Welcoming Church.
- Education women.
- Maybe more married Priests. Diaconate.
- Church more inclusive, for example, women, single people.
- Ask us what we would like to do to help.
- Being the person we should be.
- Bigger part to play.
- Role of women in Church.
- Role of married people.
- The laity more involved.
- Ability to use ministers in part of the service.
- Universal Church is required.
- Small groups for adult education.
- Adults on spirituality.
- Bus trips for families to return.
- Bible education classes.
- Deep need for faith and expression of it in different ways for the community
- Better communication, people can understand and know, for example, Church teaching, papal encyclicals.
- Option for the poor. Becoming a supportive, caring, accepting, loving Church.
- Should be allowed to discuss 'taboo' subjects such as women Priests, married clergy.
- To follow the lead of Pope Francis.
- No longer part of the establishment and therefore appealing to the youth.
- Open honest information from clergy and communication between clergy and laity.
- Catholic schools and teachers.
- Building an inclusive community with engagement with the world which would be attractive to the young.
- That amalgamated Parishes find support and hope from each other.
- Church is open both being transparent and in engaging with all, non –judgemental.
- We are a people led by the Holy Spirit.
- Increased involvement of laity freeing to do things specific to their role.
- Sharing good practice between Parishes.

- More evangelisation.
- Evangelisation programmes that are ongoing, not short lived.
- A model for laity involvement across the Deanery.
- More young people get involved.
- More involvement of laity in decision making.
- More access to Sacraments for people not allowed at the moment.
- Embrace the poor.
- Catholic education still here and hopefully goes from strength to strength.
- Women have a more important role in the Church.
- That this process, now started, will yield some answers.
- This is the hope.
- There is a level of hostility towards Parish amalgamations and closures.
- This is not unanimous.
- Adapt to and accept modern life to attract young people.
- People of faith have confidence to fight the secular movement who want to eradicate faith in public life.
- To accept change.
- Welcoming and encouraging the youth back to Church.
- Tolerance. Accepting everyone. Allowing everyone to receive the Sacraments.
- Embrace the change in unity as one Church.
- Cooperation and consistency among Churches, Parishes et cetera.
- Access to a Church each Sunday for one Mass within reasonable distance.
- Engage the young.
- Improved Catholic teaching in schools.
- More vocations. Need to bring young people back.
- Improve Catholic education of adults and children.
- More laity involvement.
- More open and honest Church - all inclusive. More emphasis on the Priesthood of the laity.
- Engaging with laity.
- Women Priests. Married Priests.
- Greater use of laity.
- Deanery community.
- Aging population.
- Start with schools.
- Embrace new technology.
- Cornerstone Church - Ark Fraser - attracts young people. Can we learn from that?
- Waiting for parents to evangelise. If they are not committed to their faith, what can be done?
- Make up of schools. Not all pupils are Catholic. Does this affect ethos of schools. Does it make it easier or harder?
- Better listening as a way of encouraging dialogue.
- Greater involvement of youngsters.

Other Comments

- Daily Prayer.
- Venue for discussion very poor. Unable to hear one another.

Appendix 1

Statistics on Parishioners attending the Meeting

	attendees	Information on Three Horizons	
		yes	no
Ardrossan – Saint Peter’s	29	29	0
Beith – Our Lady	5	5	0
Dalry – Saint Palladius’s	4	4	0
Irvine - Saint John Ogilvie	7	7	0
Irvine – Saint Mary’s	31	30	1
Kilbirnie – Saint Brigid’s	5	5	0
Kilwinning – Saint Winin’s	7	7	0
Largs – Saint Mary’s	13	13	0
Millport – Our Lady	5	5	0
Saltcoats – Saint Mary’s	19	19	0
Stevenston – Saint John’s	8	6	2
West Kilbride – Saint Bride’s	12	12	0
total	145	142	3

In the group work, 205 people sat at tables. There was one table with 12 people, three with 11 and 16 with 10.

Approximately 180 forms were given out and 145 were returned.