

SUPPORTING PARISHES TOWARDS A PASTORAL RESPONSE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD

The logo for SYCAMORE is displayed in white, uppercase letters on a solid black rectangular background. The letter 'O' is stylized as a white circle with a black outline, making it stand out from the other letters.

“EMBRACING CHANGE THROUGH THE NEW EVANGELIZATION – THE SYCAMORE COURSE”

In response to the initiative by Bishop Nolan, and after discussion with the Council of Priests, a small group has been formed to promote the use of the Sycamore Course for parishes wishing to use this as a pastoral resource as we enter into the post-pandemic period. This privileged moment offers us new opportunities for evangelization and mission, and the Sycamore Course is one way in which we might engage people in reflecting on their faith, and in offering formation for discipleship. It is a flexible programme, and can be used with groups meeting in person, or online.

Needless to say, no one course can fulfil all the pastoral needs of our parishes, but the Sycamore Course does offer us a package which can be accessed easily, and which covers a breadth of topics inviting sharing and reflection.

In order to be ready to offer the programme when restrictions are lifted and people can once again gather in groups, preparations should be taking place now. If we can do the groundwork and have people organized and familiar with the course, then hopefully we can offer it in the autumn across the diocese.

The core group have already started planning on how best to serve those parishes wishing to take up this proposal, and will offer suggestions and recommendations over the coming months. It would be good to build up a base of lay leaders from different parishes who might become the parish contacts, and who would then be familiar with the course in order to promote it locally.

It is my intention to organise several virtual meetings with parish contacts before the summer in order to progress the project, and so to build up a body of people familiar with the course.

If you would like to suggest names from your parishes of anyone who might like to be part of this project, please send me their contact details and I will be in touch.

As we come out of this Covid-19 lockdown experience our focus of attention has to be more than about getting people back to Mass. It must be about forming disciples in our parish communities who will have outreach and mission at the core of their pastoral agendas. It is about supporting people in recognizing their unique personal vocation, and in using their gifts and talents in developing their personal relationship with the Lord. The Sycamore Course is one way in which we might seek to evangelize both people and structures, and it provides us with an opportunity to engage in a process of seeing what we might become, rather than simply languishing in what we have always been.

Participating in a diocesan response presents us with strength in unity, while at the same time respects the diversity of local parishes and deaneries, and of their existing initiatives and pastoral plans.

If you would like any more information on the course, or about the ways in which the diocesan core group hope to support those parishes wishing to participate as part of this diocesan response, then do get in touch.

I look forward to hearing from you, and to working with those individuals from our local parish communities who will hopefully become the Sycamore Course promoters and animators.

William R. McFadden