

A CONSULTATION: OUR DIOCESE RESPONDS TO OUR NEEDS
DIOCESE OF PORT PIRIE
November 2013

AIMS OF THE CONSULTATION

- To consider the challenges of our diocese as summarised by Bishop Greg in his Context Statement (Appendix 1)
- To comment on our Statement of Directions 2013-2016
- To build on our strengths

NECESSARY MINISTRY RESPONSES TO OUR CHALLENGES

1. STRUCTURES:

- Linking/clustering of parishes
- Parish Council/Regional Council
- Finance Council
- Other

2. FORMS OF MINISTRY ENGAGEMENT:

- Liturgy Team
- Baptismal Preparation Team
- Bereavement Team
- RCIA/ALPHA
- Pastoral Care Team
- Family-School-Parish partnership Team
- Ecumenical engagement Team
- Social Justice Team
- ...
- ...

3. FORMATION PROGRAM:

- Formation of apostolic teams for each worship centre
- Invitation, preparation, commissioning
- Inservice, networking

4. FORMS OF CLERGY MINISTRY

- Sharing /rotation of priests within a cluster/grouping of parishes
- ‘Circuit rider’ priest assigned to a number of communities
- ...

Appendix I

Context Statement: Bishop Greg O’Kelly November 2013

1. Most of us work as local Church. We work in my school, my Home for the Aged, my parish, my particular ministry – BoysTown/prisoners/Outback people...
2. Our local ministries occupy us quite fully, and rightly. There is, however, a need to look beyond the immediate boundaries of my local ministry, and look at the broader view. There is a need to look through the lens of the whole diocese, not just the lens of a particular work. As a diocese we are a community of communities, and the structure of the Regional Councils is a recognition of this, that the different parts of our diocese have different needs, different flavours, different gifts. To be effective we must move beyond being totally local, and look through that broader lens of the whole diocese.
3. There are two issues on which we might focus to be effective. The first is the concept of **baptismal ministry** that we have been promoting in the diocese, the call to ministry coming out of our baptism. In recent times we have been attempting to raise an awareness about the vocation our baptism confers on us, calls us to. We are trying to raise an increasing sense of conviction among our people that baptism does point us to the ministry of Jesus, as we are His Body in the world. He has no hands but ours, the hands and voice of all the baptised.

The second issue is to contemplate our future, and opt for a **preferred future**, one that we might prepare for, rather than one that simply happens upon us.

I commend a reflective reading of the article **“Imagining a New Future”**, by Bishop Howard Hubbard from the Diocese of Albany in the USA, where in 2006 a three year pastoral planning process was commenced, and entitled “Called to be Church”.

There is much in what he says that echoes our situation. He notes that most of their activity has been “ad hoc”, responding to issues such as how to replace a priest vacancy, how to help parish x pay for its insurance, who is to move where when a gap occurs, etc.

Apart from those ad hoc activities, we face many of the same issues – a decline in the number of clergy, and diminishing congregations of the already aged.

Bishop Hubbard has some ideas that we might garner.

“Within the Church, some people continue to cling to the notion of parish based on the geographic boundaries or the ethnic realities of more than a hundred years ago when their parish was established to meet the needs of that time...”

Our call to be Church today necessitates that we expand the notion of parish if we are to fulfill that call. No matter how upsetting this may be for some, our love for Jesus and our call to witness to his mission and ministry require this transformation.”

There are two observations to be made in our context. **First**, we have time. We are in fact quite robust as a diocese, thank God, and there is time to plan for the shape we will have to adopt as the future evolves. **Secondly**, we must do what we can to learn from others. There is no need for us to rediscover the wheel. There are other dioceses, especially in the Outback, facing the same challenges as we do, and there are other denominations, such as the Anglicans in their Diocese of Willochra, addressing the same issues.

What are the challenges in the context of our diocese?

In the coming years there will be a reduction, not an increase, in the number of ordained clergy, pastoral leaders.

Our present reliance on Religious as pastoral leaders will necessarily be modified as more Sisters retire.

As the little towns diminish in population, and more of our people move into a reliance on pensions, there will be a steady reduction in the finances available to the diocese.

Where do we position our priests and deacons? Few of the little towns can support the priest by themselves, and there is not sufficient “work” for a full-time priest to do in a small town, so do we accept an increase in the current model whereby a priest goes to even more small towns, spending so much of his time travelling from one small place to another?

The reduction in diocesan finances would involve an inability to fund training programmes for lay leaders.

There are associated questions. Concerning our clergy, to what extent do we recruit from overseas? Is there a right balance between local and overseas ordained clergy?

Of perhaps more immediate urgency is how do we replace the Sisters who are presently Pastoral Associates, as it is so highly unlikely that their Congregations will be able to find replacements. And how do we afford to support lay Pastoral Associates?

So is there a model of Church that we opt for as our diocese? Is it one of “circuit rider” priests visiting local clusters of the faithful? Is the model of the Parish Cluster one to be implemented elsewhere – a combination of one parish to whom some clergy are assigned to serve the various congregations within the area, congregations answering the need to retain local identity?

Can we activate local lay pastoral teams to carry out the Church’s daily mission of care and prayer, working with the priest assigned to their community, who is probably not resident?

We need to look at the question whether or not the closing of churches in our small towns leads to the suppression of faith communities? In some parts this is our present experience. Again, how to animate the local faithful towards self ministry in Word and Sacrament and charity?

As Bishop I need some help, working with my clergy and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, to discern what areas we should focus on so that we do not simply keep talking about our needs, listing the same ones over and over, and not working towards exactive concrete solutions.

What nettles does the Diocesan Pastoral Council, looking at our Strategic Directions, wish to grasp? Again, it is through the lens of the whole diocese that the Diocesan Pastoral Council must focus its gaze.

Appendix II

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE LATIN AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS 28 JULY 2013 PRACTICAL CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCH

- "There is need, then, for a greater appreciation of **local and regional** elements. Central bureaucracy is not sufficient; there is also a need for increased collegiality and solidarity." What is needed is "not unanimity, but true unity in the richness of diversity."
- The church's legacy is transmitted through **witness**, and "one needs to hand it over personally, to touch the one to whom one wants to give, to relay, this inheritance."
- "Let us not reduce the involvement of **women in the church**, but instead promote their active role in the ecclesial community. By losing women, the church risks becoming sterile."
- "Do we see to it that our work, and that of our priests, is more **pastoral** than administrative?"
- "Are we creating a **proactive** mindset? Do we promote opportunities and possibilities to manifest God's mercy?"
- "Do we make the lay faithful **sharers in the mission**?"
- Do diocesan and parish councils, "whether pastoral or financial, provide real opportunities for laypeople to participate in **pastoral consultation, organization and planning**?"
- Do we give **the laity** "**the freedom to continue discerning**, in a way befitting their growth as disciples, the mission which the Lord has entrusted to them? Do we support them and accompany them, overcoming the temptation to manipulate them or infantilize them?"

The **center is Jesus Christ**. Missionary discipleship does not allow for self-absorption or self-centeredness. "Either it points to Jesus Christ or it points to the people to whom he must be proclaimed," Francis said. Neither the missionary nor the church is the "center," he proclaimed. "The center is Jesus Christ, who calls us and sends us forth." When the church "makes herself the 'center,' she becomes merely functional, and slowly but surely turns into a kind of NGO."

Question for Reflection:

Which of the above quotations from the address by Pope Francis, appeals to you? Encourages you? Challenges you?