

Fr Darren Reid Letter of 27th May 2017 Planning for the Future

Where are we?

In many ways we are blessed. We live in relative peace and relative affluence compared to much of the world.

We are free to practice our faith unhindered, often with great support from the wider community.

We have a wonderful history. Our patrimony has been fed by the blood of the martyrs; we have a Catholic culture stretching way back. The most ancient place of worship in the whole of South Yorkshire is in our deanery*. In recent times immigration from Ireland, Poland and other lands has enabled the faith to grow. In the past hundred years there has been the establishment of many parishes and schools throughout what we know today as the Doncaster Deanery. We have much to thank God for. The faith will continue to thrive; and catechesis of our future generations has to be our priority.

With these thoughts in mind we face our present dilemmas. There is a decline in the number of clergy, and in certain parts, the number of people who practice their faith is very low. There is a need to make changes, as circumstances dictate that to make no change is impossible. We have to consider how and where the necessary changes will happen. It is a time for prayer.

* AD750 St Peter's Church in Conisbrough

The Starting Point

The starting point has to be through prayer. Prior to any discussions or debates about the future we must pray. Our Lord Jesus prayed before making important decisions. The first Christians met and prayed. We must do the same. To not pray would make no sense.

Our deanery as a whole needs to first of all be made aware that changes are to happen. The whole deanery and the way we live and work will need to make adaptations in some way. We need to ask for God's help, and to be open to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

We need to set aside a month of prayer specifically to ask for God's guidance as to how best we can restructure the Doncaster Deanery.

I suggest we make the month of June 2017 a month of prayer asking God for guidance and wisdom.

Plans – Where to start?

It is very difficult to consider how and where to begin. There are a wealth of ideas, considerations and issues to consider;

Areas to consider (in no order of importance):

- Geographical locations of our parishes.
- Number of Churches in each parish.
- History and particular characteristics of each parish.
- Which parishes naturally link together?
- Which parishes are in areas of expansion and growth?
- Which parishes are in areas of little growth?
- Which parishes are in areas of affluence?
- Which parishes are blessed with large numbers of active and capable lay people?
- Which parishes are low in numbers of active and talented lay people?
- Where are our priests living at present?
- What is the age range of our priests?
- What is the projected number of priests for the coming decade?
- Retired priests shouldn't feel they are to be relied upon.
- Are deacons to be parish based or deanery based?
- Where do the deacons live?
- How can the lay apostolate evolve?
- If a parish does not have a regular Sunday Mass can it still continue?
- How do the plans for Doncaster fit with plans for the rest of the Diocese?
- The high number of immigrants (from Poland and elsewhere) need to be a voice that is heard.
- Doncaster has the majority of penal institutions that exist in Hallam Diocese, which require particular pastoral care.

The Bishop

Whilst we pray/discuss, and eventually present plans, the person of authority in all of this is our bishop. Please pray for Bishop Ralph. He will be the person who, through God's grace, will take any decisions to be made. Please pray for the Holy Spirit to rest upon him, and grant him the graces of wisdom, right judgement, and strong and purposeful leadership. Please pray that we may support him in any decisions that he makes, even when they require sacrifice on our part.

The Rest of Us

We are a mixture of people. As we come to look to our future we will all have differing points of view and no doubt a wide variety of suggestions for the future.

We need to do our very best to be objective. We need to try our utmost to look beyond our own parish community and consider what is best overall. We need to listen to our neighbour, and to be open to the point of view that is contrary to our own. With God's grace we can come together.

Lay people, deacons, religious sisters and priests all must listen to each other, support one another and help each other. Ultimately we do all want the same thing; the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ in Doncaster Deanery.

The Deanery Now

September 2015 figures:

Parish	Mass Attendance	Mass Times	Baptisms	Funerals	Receptions
Armthorpe	119*	Sun 9.00am	10	7	0
Askern	38	Sat 5.00pm	0	1	0
Denaby	200	Sat 6.30pm, Sun 11.00am	24	26	1
O L of Mount Carmel (Intake)	154	Sun 10.30am	30	13	0
O L of Perpetual Help (Bentley)	115	Sun 10.00am	22	6	0
St Peter in Chains (Doncaster)	435	Sat (Polish) 5.30pm, Sun 10.00am, 1.15pm (Polish), 6.00pm	74	46	0
St Paul (Cantley)	313	Sat 6.00pm, Sun 9.30am	16	29	5
Sacred Heart (Balby)	80	Sun 9.00am	7	2	0
Mexborough	60	Sun 9.30am	2	5	0
Moorends	91	Sun 10.30am	7	6	0
Rossington	137*	Sun 11.00am	6	12	0
Stainforth	103	Sat 6.00pm	20	11	1
Woodlands	123*	Sun 9.00am	10	15	1

*Includes Chapels of Ease:

Carcroft – 30

Finningley – 45 to 50

Klirk Sandall – 50

The Depth of our Response

To make no changes is not an option. To act will be essential. But the depth and extent of any changes needs serious consideration.

We must ask ourselves whether we make minimal changes that will sustain us for now; or do we make more far reaching changes that will look further ahead. If this were to be the case what would such changes be?

Immediate Changes

It is at present possible to identify three almost definite changes that will need to be faced in the very near future:

1. Fr. Norman will retire
2. Fr. O'Brien will retire
3. Fr. Brebner will cease to serve Moorends and Stainforth

It is unlikely that any of the above changes will result in a replacement priest from elsewhere coming to take over.

However, the response that will need to be made to the above scenarios will be no more than a short-term response.

In the longer-term it is likely that our deanery will have at most six priests. We must ask how best our deanery may be served with this number of priests (or fewer).

At this juncture, it should be noted that a reduction in the number of priests is not the only issue to consider as we look to the future. Priests are not the 'be all and end all' of Catholic life. However, the priestly ministry is key to the provision of the Eucharist; and the Eucharist is the ultimate activity to unite the people of God, the Body of Christ.

All parishes must have a designated Parish Priest according to Church law. However, several parishes are existing with a Parish Priest who lives elsewhere. The good practice in such places should be acknowledged and serve as an inspiration.

At this point and in the coming weeks I suggest we pause, pray and ponder.

