

ROTHERHAM DEANERY - SUMMARY OF SURVEY

DEAN - Office vacant

Joy experienced by parishioners from their experience of being part of a parish community and having a sense of belonging

Recognition that a parish should be outward looking, play an active part of the life of the wider community, have ecumenical relations and focus on mission.

Concern about aging congregations and questions on how to encourage younger generations to develop a sense of belonging and responsibility for the life of the parish

The number of parishioners sharing responsibilities within parishes is small and the group is aging.

Every priest in the deanery is appreciated and loved by the communities they serve but every parish expressed concern for their wellbeing, work load and health.

Sharing good practice and cooperation within the deanery and across the diocese needs improvement

Communication in the diocese is unsatisfactory and causes frustration. It needs leadership and direction

Ongoing lay formation at grass roots required. This includes training to encourage involvement of younger generations in the mission of the parish and how to be intentional in targeting groups.

Concern raised in some parishes about current initiatives within a parish to address recognised needs being ended by a change of leadership

Concerns about financial resources in parishes being sustained into the future

The diocese needs to take action now for the sake of its future. Taking difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions must not be avoided

The overall message from the diocesan leadership needs to be positive and communicate hope for the future as difficult decisions are made.

Diocese of Hallam

Deaneries of Bassetlaw and Chesterfield

Summary of Parish Reports

1. **Participation** seems to have been reasonable to good with a wide range of opportunities and discussions.
2. **Similar themes** appear throughout
 - a. *Increase need for Lay Involvement*
 - b. *Over worked Priests*
 - c. *Lack of Younger People*
 - d. *Fear of Church closure (from both People and Priests)*
 - e. *Clear acknowledgement of the issues but little in the way of solutions or engagement with necessary change.*
3. **Need for clarity of approach across Diocese**
4. **Unifying Theme.** One theme, which stands out above all others, is to disavow the credibility of the statistics. While agreeing that the statistics do not tell the full story and are a single snap shot in time, they have initiated a conversation among, both people and priests. This conversation has acknowledged; The current situation across the diocese is unsustainable. *

Conclusion

There is an acknowledgment of a need for change based on realistic needs and pastoral sensitivity. However, the clear sentiment that someone else needs to be responsible for its direction and implementation.

The same ageing few are willing to do all they can, but they are rapidly becoming incapable of bearing the responsibilities that the future presents.

**(It is my consistent experience, that today, people spend a significant amount of time searching for any minor way to disprove the credibility/validity of something/someone, in order to justify no longer needing to acknowledge the challenge/authority it/they present.)*

Facing the Future

Sheffield Deanery Concluding Report

In his letter to priests of February this year the bishop announced that he wished '*to start a consultation about the future shape of the diocese.*' He asked us to undertake a process in three stages that would seek to answer four questions:

1. *What are the good signs for your parish that you can see?*
2. *What are the concerns you have for your parish?*
3. *Where do you see your parish as we enter the year of Jubilee?*
4. *What actions do you think you/your parish need to take?*

The first two stages would see individuals, families and parish communities seeking to discern the counsel of the Holy Spirit and both individual correspondence and parochial reports concerning this request can be found attached to this report. The written reports of the parishes, which had been circulated before the meeting, helped therefore shape and inform our discussion but they did not limit its scope or conclusions.

The final stage would see the deanery clergy, '*come together and reflecting on the information themselves and the reflections of their people, summarise their conclusions in a written report compiled by the Dean.*'

From the discussion that took place the following points were made:

- In order to match our own experience we urge that the parish reports be read before reading the fruits of this discussion.
- It was agreed that the process so far had been a positive one for people. Unsurprisingly perhaps, every parish was anxious to put the best gloss on things and to stress their most encouraging experiences and signs of vitality. However, the constructive engagement and the desire to be both forward and outward looking communities were consistently evident. The acknowledgement of the need for both catechesis and evangelisation were notable. There was much that was heartening to be found in the desire of people to follow the Lord and to make him known to others.
- It was felt that the questions were somewhat lacking in focus. However, as a means of examining the state of things they were a beginning and they did get the ball rolling. It was suggested that it might enable our bishop, in this

is clear that every flock needs a visible and responsible person but especially in those places where the Parish Priest is not resident.

- Although fewer in number, there are still Missionaries and Religious who might desire a crack at tilling and sowing the soil of Hallam and they should not only be welcomed and encouraged but actively sought out and invited.
- There was a strong aspiration that we should be proactive rather than reactive. Indeed, what was clear was that there was a strong sense of *Deja vu* among both priests and people and a real feeling of frustration that all we end up seemingly doing is talking. In this deanery at least, we appear to have had a number of false starts that have resulted in next to nothing. This has at times been dispiriting.
- As we noted at the beginning of this report, this is only the '*start [of] a consultation about the future shape of the diocese.*' We ask that there be a real commitment to moving forward and continuing with the process that will result in real, concrete decisions. We have all been given a particular part of the vineyard to tend and cultivate and we know how difficult it is to prune here and prioritise growth there. We know we do not possess the authority or the oversight to decide these matters but as co-workers with our bishop we assure him of our support and of our willingness to be led.

RESPONSES TO

FACING THE FUTURE



Deanery Priests

Initial Meeting of Priests - 12 March 2024

Initial reactions to Bishop Heskett's pastoral letter of 23 March 2024 and the tables of statistics that accompanied it.

I. Some of those present considered the statistics distributed (based solely on numbers attending Mass and parish finances at the end of 2021) did not accurately represent the present state of things. At that time parishes were still recovering from the effects of the forced shutdowns due to the pandemic, along with the complications and consequent delays imposed by curial officials when we were endeavouring to reopen churches for worship.

II. Increased numbers of immigrants who have come to work in Doncaster, especially in healthcare, have boosted numbers attending Mass in parts of the deanery. Most parishes seem to be slowly but surely building up their numbers at Mass again.

III. Catholics who are sick and housebound or resident in care homes were

Ministry is essential.
Those who seek baptism and first Holy Communion, never to be seen again.

Engaging or a lack of volunteers

Spending money on urgent works on buildings that could close

Concern that funerals of parishioners are being conducted by a secular celebrant and marriages are taking place outside the Church.

3. Where do you see your parishes as we enter the year of Jubilee (2025)?

Much the same as we already are. Hopeful communities that will engage and are appealing to others.

4. What actions do you think you/your parishes need to take?

Building on what exists.

Engage more people, especially younger parishioners, as volunteers.

Encourage lay pastoral activity with the sick and housebound.

Encourage and facilitate spiritual, educational, pastoral and social gatherings in the parish.

Listening to those on the margins/peripheries e.g. the housebound.

Employing good social media in a safe and responsible way to reach out.

Outreach as the external face of the Church.

Strive to be parishes of hope.

PARISH RESPONSES

DIOCESE OF HALLAM CONSULTATION

BARNSELEY DEANERY

Consultation meetings took place in all parishes and amongst the clergy. Those unable to attend were invited to present written submissions. All documentation was collated and presented to Bishop Ralph as requested.

In summary. Parishioners across the Deanery are very proud of their parishes, their local identities and strong sense of community which have been built up over many generations and weathered many storms. All parishes took a battering during the COVID pandemic but now most are showing signs of 'bouncing back', at least to pre COVID days and, in some places, there are pockets of growth.

Without exception parishioners are immensely grateful for the hard work, generosity of heart and fidelity of their priests, both past and present. Over the years these have fostered collaboration in the vineyard between priest and people, encouraging full, active participation in the life of the parish and their worship. Across the Deanery the laity certainly do what the laity can do! This bodes well for the future when considering clergy diminution. Challenges remain, however, as wider societal willingness to volunteer reduces and reluctance to commit increases.

Across the Deanery the faithful are realistic. There is a reluctant acceptance of the realisation that what sufficed in the past cannot be maintained in the future. The Deanery landscape will inevitably have to change. While at present this is a cause of much sadness and anxiety, there is a great generosity of spirit among the faithful and an openness to trying new possibilities to meet these challenging circumstances. A 'perfect storm' looms for some parishes, whereby parish plant requires significant investment yet income is decreasing. Some difficult decisions will have to be made. Closures or parish mergers will be necessary but, with a little imagination and much goodwill, 'out of darkness comes light'! These new realities can be met and the churches future in this area secured.

Fr Damian Humphries, VF
Dean