

One Diocese 18 Partnerships Unlimited Potential

A 'Great cloud of witnesses' from across the diocese gathered at the Lancastrian Suite in Dunston, Gateshead and Carmel College in Darlington on the evening of 9th February to hear the decisions made by Bishop Séamus following the residential Diocesan Board meeting in January. Between the two venues around 1,600 people heard how all of the parishes in the diocese are now gathered into 18 partnerships. In his message Bishop Séamus stated that:

'A partnership is a group of parishes agreeing to work together, to share resources, both human and material, to



become stronger and better equipped for furthering the Kingdom of God'

Bishop Séamus is convinced that partnerships will enable formation programmes to be developed and delivered locally; that smaller communities can be supported; that the gifts, talents and financial resources in a wider area can be put at the service of more people and that a thorough review of all property will need to be carried out in the near future. Those present were given an 8-page document which included maps of every area of the diocese and which set out the new partnership arrangements. The full document, presentation slides from the evening and a video of the Bishop's message are available from the website - www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk

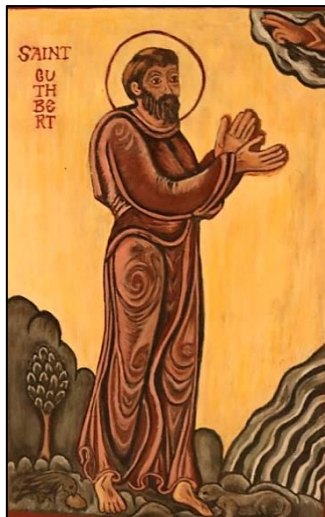


The crowds gather at Carmel College

Initial feedback from the meetings has been very positive with comments including: *'A brilliant night and whole project overall - well done to all involved'*; *'What a brilliant opportunity to come together tonight'*; *'I am grateful that I was able to be part of such a positive meeting. My hope for the future is that Partnerships grow and learn together making us more disciple-like'*.

Participants were able to ask questions on the evening and also leave written questions. Responses will be posted on the *Forward Together in Hope* website in the near future.

Pointing the Way



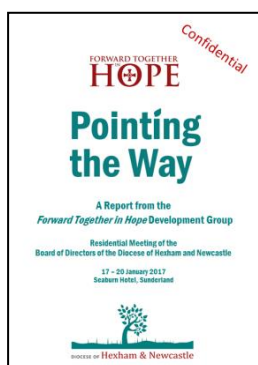
For almost 4 days at the end of January, Bishop Séamus met with the Diocesan Board – made up of the Vicar General, five Episcopal Vicars and four lay people, to explore the report ‘Pointing the Way’ prepared by the *Forward Together in Hope* team.

The meeting was underpinned by deep prayer and reflection at each stage. Kathryn Turner set up a beautiful and tranquil space that was used for Mass and prayer each day. It contained icons of the Northern Saints – including St Guthbert shown here. Some of these icons were also used within the recent open meetings.

The *Pointing the Way* report was over 180 pages long. One hundred and fifty of these pages comprised the 27 partnership proposals made by communities around the diocese. By the end of the week this number had become 18. But the report was not simply about geography. It also covered the very wide range of topics raised by parishioners in the 150 Parish Questionnaires, the 7,000 pages of documentation which came to us from surveys of young people, individuals and clergy, the notes from Deanery and Vicariate meetings along with emails and letters. These topics ranged from the hospitality offered to

people as they gather to celebrate Mass to how our worshipping communities might engage more creatively with young people. They looked at the fundamental need for lay formation and leadership development, support for clergy and the

needs of sick and frail priests in the future. The



report touched on ‘clericalism’, the role of the Board and Diocesan Services. Other items included our worship and the need for much more formation for lay leaders of worship, ecumenism, interfaith relations as well as peace, justice and care for the environment. It was impossible to do justice to everything voiced by people across the diocese, so five separate groups are in the early stages of development to address everything that was mentioned. These groups will look at: Formation; Practical Guides needed to help Partnerships develop; How all Diocesan Councils will help to serve the development of Partnerships; Communications and the Strategic Planning needed to address the breadth of thinking stimulated by the voices of all who made their views heard during the time of consultation.

Nurturing Partnerships



The recent announcement about arrangements for partnerships across the diocese marks an important milestone in our journey together. Yet, in many respects, it is only

the first step in working together in new ways. While some of the partnerships are exactly as proposed, others have turned out quite differently. Some might be ‘raring to go’ while others are having to think about how they start working with partners who didn’t feature in their original proposals.

This is a really crucial time for nurturing our ‘seedling partnerships’ and there is a fine balance between encouraging their obvious enthusiasm, creativity and imagination and taking the time to ensure that structures and approaches work coherently across the diocese as a whole. A good example is that of establishing ‘overarching groups’ or ‘councils’ for the partnership. To rush too quickly to a formalised structure before guidance is received could lead to very complex and confused governance arrangements across the diocese. And yet, to put things on hold until every last detail is finalised would mean that the

current energy and momentum are stifled. So, how best to proceed?

Practical Guidelines



We are committed to providing advice and support to partnerships in their early days of development. This will include written guidance on a range of key aspects – from spirituality through to structures. Look out for

some initial ‘first steps’ guidance before Easter. This will be followed by regular ‘chunks’ of more detailed information on topics as diverse as finance, HR, teambuilding and property – to name but a few. Once contact people are in place we will look at running a number of development sessions to ‘bring the guidance to life’.

We will also be providing a leaflet for all parishioners that will set out general information about partnerships and what happens next.

‘Think People’

Partnerships are about people, communities and relationships. An important aspect of the early stage of forming a partnership is for people to get to know each other better. Perhaps it is worth thinking about and discussing how you might start to do this across your area.

Revisit what’s already there

Over the past few months we have provided a number of documents that might actually help your thinking at this stage. You may have read them at the time or maybe they are still in a pile on the coffee table waiting for the right moment. This could be the right moment! For example why not have another look at *‘Some Food for Thought’* or *‘From Parish to Partnership’* - they are available in the Resources section of the website. You might just spot something that sparks an idea. The ‘Observations’ documents that were provided to

each parish last year might also be a good starting point for conversations with partners.

Start informally

There are lots of ways of sharing between communities that don’t rely on formal structures. Some areas are talking about getting an initial ‘development team’ together to start to look at things. Keep it informal ahead of further guidance.

Pray and be open to the Holy Spirit

Praying together and being fully open to the grace, guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the foundation for all that we are being called to do within our partnerships. Again, why not revisit some of the prayer resources we’ve provided? They contain ideas that are still relevant to this stage of developing partnerships.

Walking Together in Hope



Do you fancy some exercise and the opportunity to take part in a walk with friendly folk from across the diocese and beyond? To celebrate St Cuthbert’s Day we are organising a walk

along *Cuddy’s Corse* on Sunday 19th March – the day before the actual feast. Details will be finalised shortly but the outline plan is to start the walk (at Chester-le-Street) late morning/early afternoon, have a prayer service and a break at Finchale Priory and conclude at St Cuthbert’s tomb in Durham Cathedral. Overall, this is an 8-mile route but there will be opportunities to join just for the prayer service – or to do part of the walk too. To register your interest or to request further information please e-mail us on hope@diocesehn.org.uk. General details about the *Cuddy’s Corse* route can be found using the following links:

<http://www.northumbrianassociation.com/uploads/cuddys-leaflet.pdf>

http://www.rcdhn.org.uk/spirituality/walks/formspirit_cuddycorse.php

Our Partnership Prayer

Our new prayer for partnerships brings us back to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in our part of the world. It was the courage and faith of Paulinus, Aidan, Cuthbert, Bede, Hilda and many others who saw the light and helped it spread from here throughout the world. Jesus calls us in our time to be his disciples, to learn from him, model our lives on him and be as courageous as those original disciples who followed him in his time on earth. We are all blessed by God. We are all called to holiness and this is described by Pope Francis as *'The most beautiful face of the Church'*. We are all called to use the gifts and talents we have and now, as we begin to look beyond our own 'parish' boundaries, we wonder how we can share them with others around us. We are indeed called to nourish one another, follow the example of Jesus in serving the world, after all, God so loved *the world* that he sent his Son into it, and to live in harmony with the whole of creation.



God of all Creation,

You have constantly poured out your Spirit upon our Diocese
and kindled here a light which has spread throughout the world.

Lord Jesus, you gathered disciples to yourself
to learn from you
and to model their lives on you.

Your Holy Spirit empowered them to continue your work in the world.

Come upon us, Holy Spirit,
deepen the faith you invite us to share
and inspire us to become faithful witnesses.

As we begin to develop our partnerships,
help each one of us to use the gifts you give us
to nurture one another,
to serve the world
and to live in harmony with the whole of creation.

All of this we ask in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Most Beautiful Face of the Church?



Pope Francis states that through Baptism we are *all* called to holiness and that this call is *'The most beautiful face of the Church'*. There is something about those who are holy which makes them more courageous, more perceptive, more compassionate and more generous. This is what we are called to be. We are all unique and every one of us, in some way, can reflect the image of God in our world. No talent, no matter how small is to be hidden or left unused. As we move forward together into partnerships we want to encourage everyone to look again at their call to holiness. There is a great need and great opportunity for lay men and women to come to the fore and help us all become more aware of our responsibility to witness to Jesus in our world.

Amy Cameron is in the process of developing a holistic plan that identifies and empowers lay people in their gifts. In this first stage, she is looking for volunteers with experience in leadership and education and/or facilitation to begin to help us shape this formation. If you feel you have something to offer, please her know at amy.cameron@diocesehn.org.uk, or call on 0191 243 3304.

Keeping in touch

For the latest information about *Forward Together in Hope* and for access to the range of resources, please visit www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk.

To contact one of the *Forward Together in Hope* team (Jim O'Keefe, Nancy Gash, Amy Cameron and Tony Sacco) e-mail: hope@diocesehn.org.uk phone: 0191 243 3304. We'd love to hear your comments and suggestions.

