



Cathedral Church of Saints Peter and Paul

Cathedral Pastoral Council

c/o Cathedral House, Clifton Park, Bristol BS8 3BX

Rt Rev Declan Lang
Bishop of Clifton
St Ambrose
North Road
Leigh Woods
Bristol BS8 3PW

27 February 2017

Dear Bishop Declan,

Response to 01 January 2017 Pastoral Letter

Thank you for the invitation to respond to your Pastoral Letter read on the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, 2017.

A meeting of the Cathedral parish on 16 February attended by some 20 parishioners considered the questions posed in your letter, and the outcomes of this meeting, together with a small number of individual submissions, are the basis of this response from the Cathedral Pastoral Council.

As a Pastoral Council, we were also informed by our reflection on how far we have adopted the ideas in your *Called to be a People of Hope* guidelines. We feel strongly that these remain relevant to our parish and the wider Diocese today. Indeed, we believe that the "new" challenges you identified at the end of these guidelines (page 32) some years ago, "such as changes in family life, environmental issues, fewer priests and a consumerist culture which often marginalises people who are materially or culturally different", are even more pronounced today. As a parish, we feel we have made progress in addressing a number of your suggestions, but accept there is much more to do. At the same time, we very much took to heart your advice during your pastoral visit in May 2014 that we can't do everything, but that "whatever you do, do it well". The Council intends in the coming months to revisit its approach to *Called to be a People of Hope* and to consult with the parish community on future priorities. The Council is conscious of the parish's particular additional responsibilities as a "Cathedral" parish which involves both diocesan activities and frequently welcoming significant numbers of visitors to the parish from both the diocese and further afield.

The parish meeting felt that the Church today, particularly in our "western" culture, needs to be a rock of integrity and truth, proclaiming the gospel of God's mercy and compassion through what we say and do. We need, as an ever more outward-looking Church, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in seeking out and responding to individuals, groups and communities who need help and support in our parish, local areas or further away. The Church, as individual members, will see the face of God in all people, irrespective of origin, faith and personal characteristics. As a body, the Church must engage in national and international agendas promoting the rights to life, peace and justice at all levels. At the same time, the Church must be open and responsible in acknowledging its past failings.

Two views emerged at the parish meeting of what the Diocese might be like in 5/10 years' time. Underlying both was the strong likelihood of a significant reduction in the number of people attending weekend Masses, aging congregations, and the decline in the number of priests. One view saw a major reduction in the number of churches in the Diocese, fewer weekend Masses (a particular problem in rural areas), a reduction in opportunities for sacraments and liturgical prayer, and a weakening of the Church's ability to engage in its outward-looking mission. The other view suggested a number of opportunities which, taken together, might reduce (though not necessarily halt) the impact of the decline in congregations and priests, and hopefully lead to an even stronger Church, particularly with the diocese, deaneries and parishes acting collaboratively to agreed priorities and goals.

The following opportunities were identified:

- continue to develop the collaborative partnership between the lay and ordained baptized, by providing, through the Diocese or the Deanery
 - training for Eucharist Ministers to lead Eucharist services, thus providing more access to the Eucharist;
 - catechesis training for lay members to support and lead CLOW services, assisting in Schools, at RCIA and at other opportunities to promote more about our faith and its role today;
- encourage our congregations to be outward-looking, taking their Christian vision through proclaiming the actions of the gospel into their various communities, and by working with other Christian churches and those of other faiths to seek out and share common approaches;

- form stronger links between the “parish” church and its school/s in the formation of young people and to involve the schools more in the work of the parish
- emphasise the importance of and support for
 - young people in the Church, particularly the immediate post-confirmation age groups (a “mission for youth” was suggested);
 - young adults;
 - those who, for whatever reasons, appear to have found difficulty in continuing as active members of the church;
- support the development of “House Groups” or “Theme Groups” as ways of deepening our personal and individual understanding of the gospel’s mission today and contributing to the prayer life of the Church;
- develop a meaningful role for the Deaneries in the Diocese; at present, these have extremely limited visibility for most parishioners, few of whom are familiar with the boundaries and the parishes in the Deanery, let alone having an understanding of their role. Deaneries could in principle provide support for some of the training and support activities referred to above, and maybe continue to provide a range of Mass and other sacramental opportunities that may not be viable in individual parishes. From the perspective of the Cathedral parish, however, its location in the “Bristol South” Deanery might be reviewed;
- as well as supporting and encouraging the ideas above, the Diocese centrally might act as a visible co-ordinator of major projects to which individual parishes or Deaneries might contribute. For example, our Diocese might develop an overall well-promulgated “Justice and Peace” strategy to strengthen the initiatives at local levels. Pope Francis asks us to work towards a greater care for our environment (*Laudato Si’*), a task which requires some deep thought and then co-ordination. Pope Francis also asks us to work very closely with our Christian friends in other denominations so that we “may all be One” (*The Joy of the Gospel*); with four Anglican dioceses being wholly or in part within our Clifton diocese, we have opportunities to demonstrate our commitment and action in this regard;
- increase the presence of our local Church both regionally and nationally. The Diocese in particular can represent the views of parishes and Deaneries, and the Church as a whole, in national debate, and in providing “good news” and positive stories of the role of the church outside its own congregations in an attempt to provide a counter-balance to the often negative (or completely absent) media view of the church. Many outside the church see it as either a negative or anonymous element in the life of our times. Indeed, parishes and Deaneries might wish from time-to-time to contribute information columns to their local media. Parishes, Deaneries and the Diocese might more fully embrace the positive elements of social media in communicating within the church and beyond.

The following observations were also made at our meeting, although we recognise that they address issues which cannot be resolved within our Diocese alone:

- support for the ordination of women to the Diaconate, both to recognise the contributions women can and should be able to bring to this Ministry, and to signal beyond doubt the fundamental role of women in the future of the Church;
- the projected decline in the number of priests, not just in our Diocese, is a serious cause for concern, notwithstanding the proposals for a stronger collaborative ministry, the increased role for women in the church, and the ideas for making more widely known the contributions of our Church to the modern world. We will, of course, all continue to pray for priestly vocations. Parishes have welcomed, and have greatly benefitted from, the special gifts and experience given by the ordination of former Anglican clergy in recent years, a number of whom were married. The talents and gifts that some married Catholic men, after appropriate discernment and preparation, could bring as priests, to the future development of our Church should no longer be ignored. Whilst God presents us with the challenge to continue to be a Church of Prayer through the Mass and the Sacraments, we should not ignore the opportunity He is presenting to us at this time to sustain those opportunities.

We acknowledge that all the above presents a challenging agenda for challenging times. The Cathedral parish looks forward to joining you in taking forward whatever proposals result from your consideration of the various submissions you receive.

The Pastoral Council is very grateful to you for the tireless and committed work you do on behalf of us all in the diocese, and especially for your efforts in building positive relationships with many groups and agencies outside the church in supporting those, at home and further afield, who are particularly disadvantaged. We offer our continued support and prayers for you in all your endeavors.

With our very best wishes,

Peter

Peter Bush
Chair, Clifton Cathedral Pastoral Council