

'Unfolding God's Plan'

The Diocesan Vision

Session 2.

The 4 themes:- Evangelisation; Formation; Liturgy and Worship; Social Outreach

In Session 1, we were introduced to the Archdiocesan Vision Statement.

Our Vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

This 'Mission Statement' was presented as a starting point for our prayer, reflection and future planning. The session then explored some of the underlying concepts and terminology:

- **the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ** – discovering our mission in terms of purpose and call.
- **missionary discipleship** - through our baptism we are all called, or mandated, to be disciples, not just to be followers in a passive sense but in an active way of commitment . .
- . . . and **service** to God and our neighbour.
- **disciples who work together co-responsibly.** Co-responsibility recognises that each of us has a mission which is complementary, not in competition.

In Session 2, the emphasis was on the invitation by Archbishop Bernard in his pastoral letter on Laetare Sunday: "*I am asking you to consider where and how our diocesan priorities of evangelisation, formation, liturgy and worship and social outreach are already flourishing. I am also asking you to notice where they are not so evident and to see how parishes can work together, in one or more of these areas, to strengthen the Church's local mission.*"

As context for the deliberation of the 4 themes the session explored the traditional pattern of Christian initiation, the current programme of RCIA and discussed issues around the appropriateness of these models for the majority of Catholics who are not initiated as adults, but who are baptised as infants.

The traditional pattern of initiation in the early Church:

- Initial proclamation [sharing the 'faith']
- Personal conversion [committing to it]
- Introductory catechesis [learning about it]
- Sacramental initiation [celebrating it]
- Ongoing Christian formation [deepening it]
- Witness [living out the faith]

The RCIA programme exists for those adults, today, who may be drawn to the Catholic faith:

Inquiry	[Checking it out before committing]
Catechumenate	[Developing the basic points about Catholic faith and life]
Purification and preparation	[a time of intensifying the faith, particularly during Lent in the run up to Easter]
Initiation	[reception into the Church and the sacramental life]
Mystagogy	[reflection and further learning about the Mass and the Sacraments to allow full participation in the life of the Church]

The remainder of the session followed a similar pattern, in that:

- each of the four themes was 'defined' [in relation to the '6 Vision Sessions' undergone by the clergy],
- exploration of the theme,
- outlining the work of the appropriate diocesan sub-group
- an activity based on each theme in relation to how it is 'flourishing' or otherwise, in the parish, and what further may be done.

Evangelisation: "Encouraging others to know God's love for them by inviting them to church, to pray and to encounter Christ, and to groups where they can learn about Him. "

It relates to forming missionary disciples and missionary parishes.

The word 'evangelisation' comes from a Greek verb that simply means *'to bring good news to others'*. Thus, anything that involves sharing the Christian faith and bringing others to know Christ and his Church is part of the work of evangelisation.

Primary evangelisation is understood to be the task of reaching out to those people and cultures that have never known Christ and his Gospel.

Secondary evangelisation or re-evangelisation, according to Pope John Paul II, *involves the mission of the Church 'particularly in countries with ancient Christian*

roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel'

Pope Francis outlines three focuses for evangelization ...

- ❖ the care of those already committed,
- ❖ engagement with those who are lapsed,
- ❖ outreach to those who do not believe.

This has significant implications for the growth, development and sustainability of our parishes and the Church, particularly the Western Church.

The stark reality is that:

Many countries that have historically identified themselves as Christian are now losing touch with their Christian roots. . .

- the general culture often becomes increasingly secularised and pluralistic
- the moral and legal assumptions of society are less and less influenced by Christian values;
- fewer people identify themselves as Christian.

In the UK, between 2001 and 2011, there was a decrease in people who identify as Christian (from 71.7 per cent to 59.3 per cent) and an increase in those reporting no religion (from 14.8 per cent to 25.1 per cent).

On census day, 21 March 2021, 46.2% of people identified themselves as Christians, compared with 59.3% of the population in the 2011 census, a 13-percentage point drop in a decade.

The number of people identifying as Christians dropped by 5.5 million in the past decade.

While all the other major religions witnessed increased numbers, the deficit in those identifying as Christians was comfortably surpassed by the increase of 8.5 million who stated no religion, rising to 22.2 million.

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Formation: "Growing leaders in our churches, schools and parish communities, by providing both spiritual and pastoral formation and support, to help prepare us for new roles and by helping us to understand more about our faith in order to deepen our personal relationship with God."

The words of Hosea remind us that we have already been formed by God and that our formation is an ongoing process:

*"When you were a child I loved you.
I myself taught you to walk.
I took you in my arms:
Yet you have not understood that I was the one looking after you.
I led you with reins of kindness, with leading strings of love.
I was like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek:
Stooping down to you I gave you your food."*

The session explored the four dimensions of 'formation':

Spiritual formation involves understanding [and practising!] the Christian virtues, the Church's sacramental life, the different methods of prayer, the role of Mary and the saints . . .

Human formation involves growth in the basic virtues common to every mature human person, not only Christians: honesty, self-discipline, responsibility, perseverance, kindness, good manners, loyalty, solidarity....

Intellectual formation - *"you cannot love what you do not know."* If we don't know Christ, we cannot love him. If we don't know the truth of Church teaching, we cannot follow and spread it. It needs to be applied to current issues, enriched by human experience and reflection and through keeping up to date on what's happening in the world.

Apostolic formation - Every Christian, according to an ancient saying in the Church, is "another Christ." Christ was a man wholly dedicated to others. Each one of us is called by God to follow in Christ's footsteps through defending and extending Christ's Kingdom in the world. Take '**CHRIST**' out of CHRISTIAN and what have you got?

I A N . . . I Am Nothing!

Liturgy and Worship: "Invigorating and deepening our worship and sacramental celebrations so that we share in, and radiate, the divine life of God and encouraging others to join us in prayer to our Heavenly Father."

The sacraments form an effective part of the work of Evangelisation and are a 'gateway' into experiencing the Church for 'outsiders'.

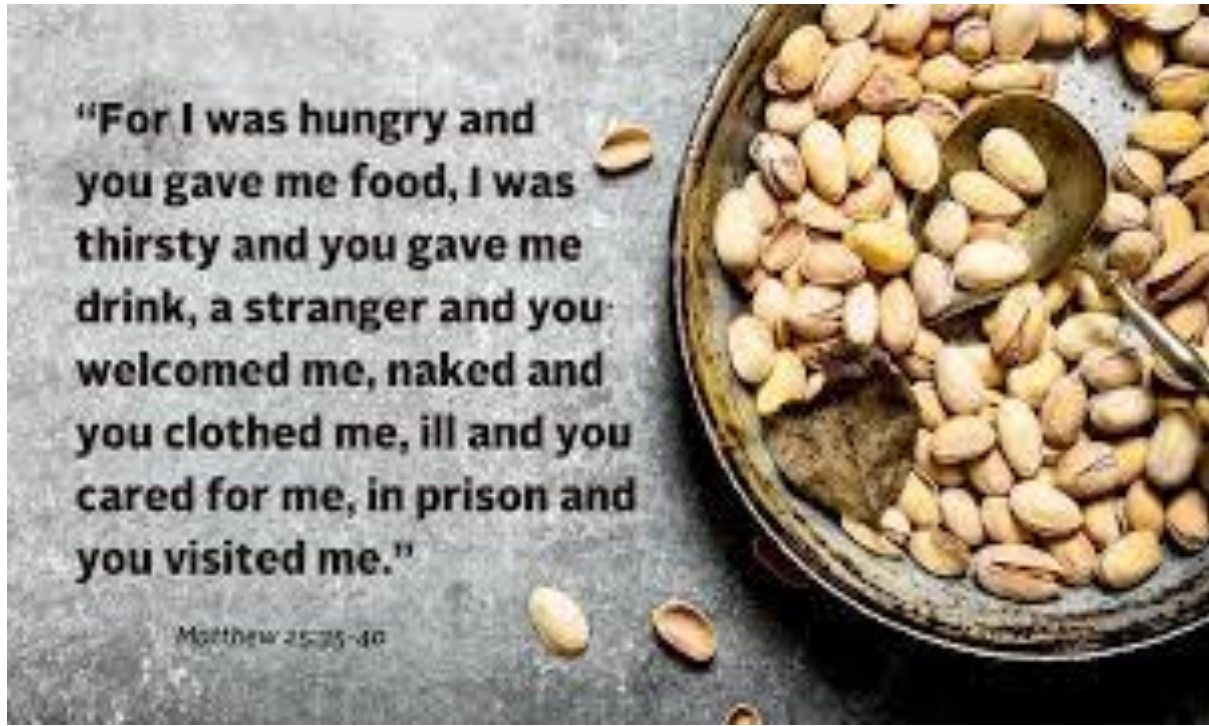
The sacraments and other forms of worship are both the context in which the faith is being proclaimed and a lived experience of a community of faith.

The liturgy is the source and summit of the Christian life.

The fact that Jesus Christ is present in the liturgy and the sacraments, supremely in the Holy Eucharist, means that an encounter with the liturgy is an encounter with Christ himself.

Social Outreach: "Building up the common good through our charitable outreach in the giving of our time, our resources and our love to those who need it most and inviting others to join us in our charitable work. "

We are reminded of the Gospel imperative:



The next session will:

- briefly review the outcomes of the previous meeting
- explore what we mean by 'parish'
- . . . including parish culture
- review what we as a parish are doing well . . .
- and how we can improve on it
- consider what we are not doing well . . .
- and how we can do it better
- explore what we are not doing and that we should be doing to enhance the life of our parish[es]
- Quo vadis? Where are we going . . . – the future pattern of parish life in the next ten years.

So, even if you were unable to be present at the previous sessions you will be most welcome to join us and participate in this session.