

A Vision for Working Together To Evangelise Our Brentwood Diocese 2019

(Version of a talk given by Steve Webb, the newly appointed Diocesan Director of Development for the Brentwood diocese, given Saturday 25th February 2017 at Brentwood, to members of the Clergy and the Stewards of the Gospel – abridged and edited by Damian Walsh for the Ginger Group).

I have been appointed by Bishop Alan and the DSPG to help as Director of Development - to come up with new and advanced ideas for our church. This appointment is an event that constitutes a new stage in our changing situation. Jesus did not come into the world to maintain the status quo. He came into the world to change things, to turn the world upside down. God has always been with us, has always loved us, and always invites us to love Him and our neighbour.

One hundred years ago the structure of the Church in Essex changed dramatically when the Archdiocese of Westminster was divided and the Diocese of Brentwood was erected. That was a big deal. It was a huge and rather controversial change but it is what we take for granted as the normal way of things in 2017. So this year we celebrate 100 years of the Diocese of Brentwood and for me that centenary celebration also marks the beginning of the next 100 years. There are about a quarter of a million Catholics in our diocese and every week about one in five of those people are in church celebrating Mass. This is the church of 2017. We are the church of 2017 in East London and Essex. We are the people on whom the responsibility falls to develop our church for the next 100 years so that more people can hear the Gospel message and more souls can be saved.

Pope Francis *dreams of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself.*

Today that is our missionary option and it is one that we must take up. It is our responsibility to transform ourselves and our parishes and ultimately to transform East London and Essex.

Pope Francis goes on to say that:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.

If we are to be wise, that does not mean that we must be blindly optimistic. We must not look away from the things that interfere with our missionary option, our joy or our new chapter of evangelisation. We must confront them head on; we must tackle every potential impediment to our development, as the Holy Father says:

Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!

So... I will try to be your Director of Development adhering to this spirit of realistic optimism and joy, overcoming challenges as they present themselves. I will look at everything afresh and I will facilitate a time of discernment, decision making and change for our Diocese, as we seek to make best use of our resources to spread the Gospel and to offer the best possible pastoral support to Catholics across Essex and East London.

My role will involve the design and management of a diocesan change plan involving clergy, lay people and other stakeholders. We will look at everything afresh. Everything we do, everything we have and everything we are. On a daily basis I will always try to heed Bishop Alan's recurring message that we must put God firmly at the centre of all that we do and use prayer as the basis of everything. Whenever it looks like I am failing in this..... and it will.... please help me. Together we will be working towards that missionary impulse capable of transforming everything in our diocese. Together we will work to evangelise our diocese. Today we are a rich blend of Priests and Laity walking together in a new stage in a changing situation. We all have different talents and gifts and when we engage in a fruitful dialogue and work together guided by the Holy Spirit we can do almost anything.

I know that not everyone is as enthusiastic about change as I am. I know that for some, "change" is a scary word leading to a very scary place where the unknown lives. I know that everyone has different responses to the idea of change, to the process of change and to the results of change. Change is a process and as a catholic community we are effectively on a pilgrimage through that process to a place that we do not yet know.

Everyone will be heard and listened to and everyone will be taken seriously. I will go through the results of that process of enquiry with equal care, prayer and respect. Once I have done these things and conferred with the Bishop, his council and the DSPG, I will tell you in some detail how I think we should move forward together and then we will look at the direction of travel together to map out our journey. We will discuss that together later on in the year but right from the word go we will begin to implement some practicalities that will enable parishes to grow in the ways that they work together to evangelise our diocese and how they organise themselves.

The Stewards of the Gospel and the Clergy are both valuable and valued parts of this process and I will want to keep your contribution to the forefront of this work. I will arrange future meetings in the next few weeks and they will begin to look at some of the immediate and practical ideas that are brought forward.

Please bear in mind that I have not yet started work formally but that said my intention is that the following timetable will be implemented.

Planning timeline:

10th April 2017 is my official start date.

13th April 2017 is the date by which you have all been asked to submit your responses to the questionnaires.

Easter

By 19th May I will have reviewed and analysed all the Responses and made some ***Preliminary Observations***.

I will separately provide feedback at this point and I invite you to organise parish or even multi parish meetings in late May or early June to consider that feedback.

By mid June I will have discussed my Preliminary Observations with the Bishop's Council and the DSPG and modified them.

By end June we will meet again as Stewards and Priests to discuss practical ideas that can begin to be put into operation across our diocese right away to evangelise our diocese.

By mid July I will prepare a confidential ***Draft Working Plan*** for our Diocese towards fulfilling our Vision for Bishop Alan, his Council and the DSPG.

By end July I will write to ask Stewards and Priests for their opinions (based on feedback from parishioners) on some of the issues that arise from the draft working plan. ***By end***

September we will meet again to discuss those questions and ideas.

By early November I will finalise what I am currently calling the ***First Consultation Proposal*** together with the Bishop's Council and the DSPG. This will be based on the draft working plan and the discussions we will have. It will set out a short, medium and long (25 years) macro plan for our whole diocese and will refer to many micro plans for individual parts of our diocese.

It is my intention to publish this **First Consultation Proposal** in the week between **Christ the King and the First Sunday of Advent 2017**.

I will ask every parishioner to read the **First Consultation Proposal** and pray about the contents and then after Christmas meet as a parish to discuss it and present us with feedback before this time next year. I invite parishes to arrange dates for those meetings right now.

At end of February 2018 we will come together to discuss the First Consultation Proposal.

During Spring and Summer 2018 together with the Bishop and the Bishop's Council we will transform the **First Consultation Proposal** into a ***Formal Proposal for our Diocese***.

We will meet again in the **Autumn of 2018** to discuss that **Formal Proposal for our Diocese** and in **the week between Christ the King and the First Sunday of Advent 2018** we will publish an amended final version of the proposal as ***The Vision for the Diocese of Brentwood 2019***.

In 2019 we will start to implement the Vision.