

GINGER GROUP Newsletter Summer 2017

Hello. The **Ginger Group** is our parish response to the diocesan **Stewards of the Gospel** 'once in a generation' strategic planning and change initiative. We are an open group, tasked by Fr Richard, to address the issues confronting all parishes in the diocese, and arising from the Bishop's lead on change for the areas of Evangelisation and Administration.

Drivers for change include the predicted changing demographic situation in our clergy population, with a community of priests declining in numbers, whilst conversely the number of Catholics within the diocese is increasing. In parallel the diocese – including our own parish, as identified in the recent **Quinquennial Report** – faces financial challenges, the essence of which questions the affordability of some existing church premises in relation to their plate offerings.

The **Stewards of the Gospel** change initiative involves all parishes in the diocese, seeking to work together across parish boundaries, anticipating likely changes, influencing the design of proposals and plans on a consultative basis, and shaping the destiny of the diocese and parish life.

Although the diocesan change process has been running for over 2 years, we have been warned that many parishioners are 'dramatically underestimating' the probable degree of change coming our way in the diocese, and we are being encouraged to 'get real'. Instead of feeling the situation as a threat, we are invited rather to embrace the challenge as an opportunity for growth and development.

The spirit of the process set out by Bishop Alan is one of consultation and discernment between the lay of the diocese and their clergy, rather than a top-down style. Typical of this method is the convening of conferences on a quarterly basis, to which all **Stewards of the Gospel** and all **Clergy of the Diocese** are invited to attend, participate and support. The most recent of these conferences was in Brentwood on Saturday 24th June, and the next conference will be Saturday 30th September.

Bishop Alan has also created a new role – **Diocesan Director of Development** – a salaried professional role, and the bishop appointed Steve Webb, who took up this role in April 2017. Steve has been active in bringing the disciplines of organisational development, change management and planning to the **Stewards of the Gospel** initiative, all within the ethos of Catholic principles and spirituality.

So far Steve has outlined a method of working, and a timetable of milestones and deliverables within that method. In summary, the key points are as follows:

TIMEFRAMES

- 1) Short term: Now (summer 2017) to 2019
- 2) Medium Term: 2020 to 2025
- 3) Long Term: 2025 to 2035

OUR VISION

Our vision is of a diocese working together with joy to evangelise our diocese, recognising the Church's deepest nature and relying on the productive dialogue between priests and people.

OBJECTIVES

In order to attain our Vision, we shall need to work together to achieve two objectives.

- 1) Maximise the opportunities to evangelise our diocese
- 2) Maximise sacramental provision

STRATEGY

- The Renewal of Our Diocese
- The Restructuring of Our Diocese



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So far all the parishes of the diocese have taken part in answering a wide-ranging **Parish Questionnaire**, the results of which were submitted during the Offertory at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week at Brentwood Cathedral, April 2017. These **Questionnaire Responses**, including our own, have now been read, scrutinised and analysed, then discussed and debated at the **Diocesan Strategic Planning Group** (DSPG) meetings which take place monthly at Brentwood Cathedral, with **Bishop Alan** present along with his team of **Episcopal Vicars**, and a small group of lay **DSPG** members.

Steve's role was to read and analyse all the **Questionnaire Responses**, and to respond with his **Preliminary Observations** in June 2017. From those observations he crafted a draft '**Working Plan**' presented as the '**First Consultation Proposal on the Renewal and Restructuring of our Diocese**'. This proposal was published and made available in hard copy in parishes for all to read on Monday 7th August 2017, and also online on the **Brentwood Diocese Website** to freely download and read. The title of this document is: '*Working Together to Evangelise Our Diocese*' (Summer 2017).

The **Draft Working Plan** will also be presented at the next **Stewards of the Gospel and Clergy Day** on Saturday 30th September 2017. Then, following an autumn season of continuing consultation, prayer and refinement work, the polished next version of the plan will be presented to the wider diocese as the **First Proposal** during Advent 2017.

Then in early 2018 there follows a period of review by the parishes: reflection, prayer and discussion. Parishes have been asked to schedule formal meetings in January 2018 (our **Ginger Group** meeting is set for Saturday 6th January 2018), so that parish feedback on the **First Proposal** can be collected and then presented back to Brentwood **DSPG** in February 2018. Using that feedback the **DSPG** and **DDoD** will evolve the **First Proposal** into a first draft **Final Plan** after Easter 2018. The end goal is to build up to publication of the '**Final Formal Proposal for the Renewal and Restructuring of our Diocese**' on the Feast of Christ the King (25th November 2018): '*The Vision for the Diocese of Brentwood 2019*'.

What do we need to do in Great Bardfield and Thaxted parish?

The **Ginger Group** is fully on board trying to align with and support the challenges the Bishop and our diocese clearly face. Having now completed our **Parish Questionnaire** and submitted our **Parish Questionnaire Response** on time, we now have the work to consider what our own parish proposal would look like. The way we have agreed to do that is that each GG member, having read and reviewed our **Parish Questionnaire Response** booklet, which is publicly available for all parishioners to read, will then reflect, pray, discern and discuss, so as to come up with their own individual so-called **Personal Proposal**. These are to be captured in a short 90 seconds film uploaded to a dedicated GG DropBox where we can all see each other's **Personal Proposals**, irrespective of whether we can manage to attend all GG Meetings or not.

Informed with this *collective* understanding of each other's **Personal Proposals**, the GG members will then shape a **Formal Parish Proposal** to submit to the Parish Council for discussion, review and hopefully approval. Once a **Formal Parish Proposal** is settled upon, this will be sent to Brentwood **DSPG** before the end of September 2017, in time for its inclusion in the diocesan **First Proposal**.

Urgent next steps?

Meantime we are invited to give feedback on the now available diocesan **Draft Working Plan**, and to contribute with our own **Formal Parish Proposal** to the formation of the *diocese's* **First Proposal**. Quoting from the **Draft Working Plan**: 'We would be grateful for your answers to these questions (A,B & C) by 30 September 2017 and certainly no later than 21 October 2017. It is our hope and intention to take your responses to these questions and then to put forward a **First Formal Proposal for the Renewal and Restructuring of Our Diocese** in November 2017.'

Thank you!