

Newbury St Joseph's feedback re Diocesan 10 Year Plan December 2022

Introduction

We, the parishioners of Newbury St Joseph's, understand that this is a long-term plan and many of the changes are not imminent, but we still think it is important that we raise all of our concerns.

We held two meetings which were attended by a total of 34 people, whose ages ranged from 14-85.

Christ at the Centre

1 Mass and the Eucharist

Mass & the Eucharist: A reaffirmation of the Eucharist as the source and summit of our lives and a radical recommitment to Jesus Christ in prayer and our sacramental life.

(Bishop Philip is calling parishioners to live in a way that includes "Holy Mass at least on Sunday in person; Prayer, Bible, and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Monthly confession to receive the grace of reconciliation and mercy of God; A penitential offering and a commitment to serve others....")

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith. Our proposed parish is 27 miles wide. If people can't physically get to where Mass is being celebrated, people will be denied the Body of Christ. Adoration is not a sufficient alternative: Jesus said 'Take and eat'.

Reconciliation requires being in the same room as the priest. This could be logistically difficult.

Some people go to Mass every day and feel starved if they can't get to Holy Communion.

Priests will have even less time to celebrate the Sacraments and pastor the people with all the driving that they will have to do.

2 People of God: Clergy

People of God: Clergy: Supporting our clergy to meet the challenges of our time by developing a supportive and more structured approach to ongoing formation, personal development, and accompanied reflection.

We currently have 4 parish priests of whom one is newly appointed and another has been here less than a year. The speed at which this plan is being implemented is a huge burden on them all.

Managing the logistics of running such a vast parish will be stressful and exhausting. The clergy can serve more than one church, but many people will be loyal to their old church community and want to focus their efforts there.

3 People of God: Lay Faithful

People of God: Lay Faithful: Developing opportunities for the formation of our laity, growing in the knowledge of our faith to nurture personal growth in holiness and to realise and nurture the gifts and talents of all in service of the church.

To thrive, people need to know and understand each other and feel that they are known and understood. We can only realise and nurture the gifts and talents of people if we know them. We can't know each other in a parish spread over approx. 162 square miles.

Are the materials and equipment needed for proper formation of the laity to be physically carted around this vast area in order to avoid duplication?

It is hard enough to get people to attend very local meetings.

4 People of God: The Young Church

People of God: The Young Church: Our missionary communities helping young people to encounter Jesus Christ; through accompaniment and meaningful involvement in all aspects of church life. Fostering vocations to all states of life and ministry and supporting young communities of faith.

The diocese should think more about how to communicate with young people, e.g. produce a Youth version of this plan.

Provide DVD and online courses specifically designed for Catholic Youth.

Ask young people what they need and yearn for from the Church.

Young people and parents have such busy lives, Church activities must be local.

Young people can't travel without parents chauffeuring them.

Youth like to mix with people they know.

18-25s will meet online; teenagers want to be in the same room.

This is not possible in a parish of 162 square miles.

Missionary Communities

5 Church Beyond Walls

Church Beyond Walls: Developing welcoming inclusive missionary communities, reaching out to others in their time of need, and welcoming seekers and strangers.

How can we “reach out to others in their time of need” in such a vast parish where people can so easily be invisible?

In such a fluid population, how would we even know who is a seeker or stranger?

6 Responding to Laudato Si

Responding to Laudato Si: Taking practical steps to meet the challenge of stewardship of our common home and understanding the relationship between environment and social justice.

How does the fuel needed for priests and parishioners to get to and from Mass and other events spread over such a wide area fit with the diocesan aim to reduce our environmental impact?

7 Christian Voice

Christian Voice: Working with other Christian faiths and people of goodwill to foster mutual understanding, carry out our mission, and remind the world of the Gospel Message.

Not discussed.

8 Stewardship

Stewardship: Prudent stewardship of all our resources, time, talent, and treasure to ensure a sustainable and vibrant future.

Safeguards to avoid allocation disparities i.e. joint funds not to be e.g. used for the needs of just one of the current parishes.

Does it disincentivise local efforts if it's not a local account?

Pooling could be helpful and efficient.

We are greatly perturbed by the diocese's approach to fund-raising. The 'Closer to Christ' Campaign Office has a pledge form which, we are given to understand, parishioners can only get in a private meeting with a diocesan fund-raiser. The form asks each household to pledge over the next 5 years a total sum of “£100,000 or £75,000 or £50,000, or £25,000, or £10,000 or other”. This is a shockingly crass approach, especially in these uncertain and difficult times. It makes people feel that their more realistic donation is inadequate and unappreciated. Many people might leave a Church that shows so little understanding of their circumstances.

9 Pastoral Structures

Pastoral Structures: Ensuring that we are organised to develop flourishing missionary communities with the right resources including our people, our estate and our finances.

There should be an executive summary context of why this plan is needed.

The whole plan is flawed: the process is too fast and back to front. Bishop Philip sees this as “a call to everyone to” engage with “the work of renewal”. But people need to be formed first to become “missionary disciples who are on fire with the Holy Spirit” before they will “make a personal response and commitment” and “join with the clergy in inviting others to a life of faith, building up the parish community, and serving others.”

The proposed new parish is far too big - 27 miles wide. Because of their position near the M4, the two easiest churches to reach are Newbury St Joseph and Theale St Luke.

However, to use Newbury St Joseph, people from Thatcham Our Lady and Newbury St Francis travel 6 miles (round trip); Woolhampton St Mary travel 16 miles; Hungerford Our Lady 19 miles; Theale St Luke 31 miles; and Pangbourne Our Lady and St Bernadette 40 miles (or 26 miles on country lanes).

To use Theale St Luke, Pangbourne Our Lady and St Bernadette travel 7 miles; Woolhampton St Mary travel 10 miles; Thatcham Our Lady 19 miles; Newbury St Joseph 31 miles (or 24 via A4); Newbury St Francis 41 miles (or 30 miles on country lanes); and Hungerford Our Lady 56 miles.

In this rural area, practicalities negate the plan’s aim to “welcome, accompany and include everyone, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties”. All journeys would be by car: public transport is practically non-existent. Even presuming they have a car, those on a limited budget; those with small children; the sick and elderly; shift-workers; exhausted commuters; those with minimal faith, cannot be expected to travel far.

Car parking is already an enormous problem.

No church is big enough to hold everyone in the proposed parish. So do priests and people spend e.g. the Triduum driving around the county?

Whilst still unwieldy, it makes more sense geographically and logistically to have Hungerford Our Lady/Newbury St Francis/Thatcham Our Lady/Newbury St Joseph as one parish and Theale St Luke/Pangbourne Our Lady and St Bernadette /Woolhampton St Mary as another.

If people get out of the habit of going to Mass each week, they are much more likely to lapse.

Some will revert to Mass online where they never receive the Sacrament.

Under this plan, numbers will plummet.

General Feedback

Make it easier to read on a PC

Simplify the message – too wordy

The pictures are not relatable

The little booklets were inadequate

Key:

Red type - Diocesan description of each priority.

Numbering: The numbers 1 to 9 are the diocese's order of priorities in the document.

St Joseph's Newbury, 13th December 2022