

**Doddinghurst – Hutton – Ingatestone –
Ongar – Stock – Walsingham House at Abbotswick**

Parish partnership – Updates for Parishioners, July 2019

This update comes to you after two years of consultation in parishes, from 2017-2018, which helped to shape the Diocesan Vision published at the beginning of Advent 2018. This Vision asked all parishes in the Diocese to work in partnership with groups of neighbouring parishes, recognising both the value of working together, and the reality of declining numbers of priests.

From January 2019 until now the Stewards of the Gospel and Clergy from each parish in the partnership have met about once a month. From these meetings we have gained an understanding of each other's parishes, and faced the very tough questions about how best to serve the Partnership area in the likely scenario of one priest (supported by the priest resident at Walsingham House at Abbotswick) covering the entire area of the partnership, possibly as soon as 3-5 years from now. We have fed back to parish councils between meetings.

From those conversations, and recognising the great strengths of each community, we have developed a clear principle which we hope will be endorsed by every parishioner in the partnership:

**Key principle: We aim to preserve and enrich every
worshipping community within the partnership**

We have identified the following strengths within the partnership:

- **Community identity** – the sense of “village community” in Ingatestone, Stock, Doddinghurst and Ongar.
- **Ecumenism** – ecumenical links are good: dialogue with existing ecumenical contacts about the partnership will be helpful, so everyone is kept informed and links remain strong.
- **The school within the partnership** – St Joseph's, Hutton – has been “Outstanding” for many years; pastoral care for the school needs to be an integral part of the partnership plan.
- **CAFOD** is strongly supported by each parish in the partnership.
- **The halls** at St Joseph the Worker and Doddinghurst are a great resource for the partnership
- **The story of Fr Thomas Byles** (former Parish Priest of Ongar, who is being considered for Canonization) is a wonderful and inspiring local story, with resonance across the world

We have identified the following areas where we can work effectively together:

- **Sacramental provision** – shared Marriage preparation, and preparation for Confirmation
- **Music / Liturgy / Welcome** – fewer Masses may mean we can concentrate “talent” to give the very best liturgical and welcoming experience at each weekend Mass.
- **Sharing and publicising opportunities across the partnership** – social activities, talks
- **Training and formation** for Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, Readers, etc, including a retreat at Walsingham House at Abbotswick.
- **Considering some combining of parish groups** – an SVP for the partnership, perhaps, rather than separate groups in each parish; a Justice and Peace group across the partnership, etc.
- **Fundraising & Charitable projects across the partnership** – in Lent and Advent agreeing common projects, to build a sense of partnership identity
- **New opportunities?** Things we may not have done before, because each individual parish was “too small” but where there is now a different kind of opportunity. A partnership pilgrimage? A joint “Christmas Card”, delivered to *all* households across the partnership, as part of evangelisation?
- **Co-ordinating visits to and lifts for the elderly and housebound**, particularly to ensure as much accessibility as possible to Masses at revised times, or in different locations.

In principle, we are in agreement with the Diocesan Strategic aim to employ a Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator.

- The consultation responses indicate “youth” as the highest priority for almost every parishioner. The employment of a Youth Co-ordinator will enhance and deepen our engagement with young people, giving fresh opportunities beyond the existing Sacramental Programmes. **Investing in provision for young people is essential to revitalising and growing our parish partnership.**
- In the autumn, we will give further consideration to the way this role could be funded, the job description, and the many other practical considerations required to make this role a success.

We are actively considering Mass times within the Partnership preparing for the time when Priests retire or leave active ministry, such that there will be one priest to cover the five existing churches, supported by a priest resident at Walsingham House at Abbotswick.

Guiding our considerations are:

- The agreement that there will be one Mass in each of the existing churches and Mass centre. This will include a Saturday evening Mass in one location.
- The fact that no priest should, as a matter of regular practice, say more than three Masses over a weekend.
- The desire to ensure there is space after each Mass for parishioners to socialise, and to bring pastoral concerns to the priest.
- The particular place of Hutton, given the location of the primary school.
- We aim to ensure the implementation of any change will be **gradual**, and will happen with lots of notice.

The question of Finance within the partnership will be a “work in progress” as new arrangements are established. While some income may be lost as a result of fewer Masses, it may also be the case that vibrant Masses, in fuller churches, attract people to return. In addition we anticipate rental income from presbyteries that are no longer in use by priests.

- The partnership will work as a “Federation” of parishes, so that each parish retains financial autonomy. partnership costs would be allocated between parishes.
- It is likely that there will be one “administrative hub” for secretarial support for the Partnership, as well as the production of newsletters, etc. It is not yet clear where this would best be situated.
- With one priest, at least three presbyteries will be vacant. These could be rented to Catholic teachers, who are often desperate for housing when they first move to a new area / school. One presbytery could also be the home of the Youth Co-ordinator.

Please give your initial reactions to these proposals to your Steward of the Gospel, or the Chair of your Parish Council.

The group of clergy and Stewards will meet on 18th July to consider your initial reactions, and we will continue to work in the autumn, to get the best possible plan for the partnership. In particular, we will set our ideas against the areas named in the Diocesan Vision Document, to ensure that the focus of the future is about **renewal**. The Diocesan Vision Document highlights the following areas, some of which we have covered in this document, and some of which we are yet to discuss:

Formation,	Charity,	Christian Life & Worship,	Youth,	Leaders,	Education,
Family,	Integration,	Material Assets,	Prayer & Spirituality,	Vocations,	Priests & People

Please wrap all of this in prayer; similar conversations are happening across the whole Diocese, and any change can be difficult and demanding. A lot of compromise and sacrifice will be needed – but, we hope, there will also be a great strength and joy in working as a family of parishes, bringing the love and witness of Jesus Christ to the communities where we live.

David Berry, Mary Brooks, Alan Chapman, Fr Anthony Cho, Brendan Dunn, Fr Dominic Howarth, Willa Jackson, Fr Leslie Knight, Caroline L'Estrange, Bishop Thomas McMahan, Fr Emile Nkumu