

**Results of Consultation
on the proposed
York Area Parishes
Re-organisation**

**Commissioned by
Middlesbrough Diocese**

**Undertaken by
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Executive Summary

In 2012 Bishop Draine invited the Centre for Catholic Studies at the University of Durham to carry out a consultative study which would assist him in discerning how to ensure adequate pastoral care and apostolic outreach in York over the next 10 years, against a background of significant decline in the number of priests that he could make available to the existing parishes. He anticipated that in 5 or 6 years there might be only three priests where there are currently seven serving nine parishes.

The study initially created a profile of the Catholic community in the York area and consulted with the current parish priests which enabled the team to identify three different options as a basis for focusing discussions with parishioners.

- Option 1 involved the extension of twinning parishes
- Option 2 was the formal redrawing of parish boundaries into three larger parishes
- Option 3 was the creation of a single parish for York in which the priests would serve as a team.

Between February and May 2013 the consultants held meetings with parishioners following the principal weekend Mass in nine parishes. At these meetings the options were outlined and opportunities for discussion, question and comment provided.

Approximately 900 parishioners attended these meetings out of a Mass-going population of 3000. In addition parishioners were encouraged to submit written views and over 100 separate submissions were received. The consultants also met the Heads of all the Catholic schools in the area and the Carmelite Order who support the Diocese in regard to the University and Hospital Chaplaincies.

A number of important issues emerged from the consultation: -

- Parishioners emphasised the need for a coordinated and planned approach to the problem, and supported a phased plan. There was a high level of support for a York-wide steering group to manage the changes and for a city-wide forum to develop and share a vision for the care and support of Catholics in the York area.
- Whilst most parishioners welcomed the consultation, there was a strong desire for a more sustained dialogue between the Diocese and parishes and a call for an executive summary of the consultant's report to be made widely available.
- The traditional model of priest-led parishes and a largely passive congregation was changing and new models were needed based on a more

collaborative ministry. Lay involvement was seen as critical in future supported by proper training and development.

- As the pressure on priests increases so does the need to prioritise their core role and responsibilities. Priests in York have a larger than usual number of additional responsibilities [hospital, hospice, prison, orders, etc.] Without additional support priests will struggle to cope with twinning, clustering or other changes.
- Parishioners wanted extended opportunities for adult formation and training and a wider promotion of the Diaconate.
- Administrative systems were seen as a starting point for working more collaboratively across York and more effective use could be made of presbyteries and other buildings for social housing and others uses.
- Both parishioners and schools felt a greater focus on youth development was urgently required. To many young adults the Church seemed irrelevant and did not speak to them or engage with them effectively. Faith in action amongst young people was seen as strong.
- The combined resources of all concerned [parents, parishioners, schools and clergy] working together was seen as essential in support of youth development and many supported the idea that more could be done on a cooperative basis across York.

Analysis and review of the structural options for reorganisation identified pros and cons for each option. Twinning, although a well-established response and one generally favoured as a transitional step, is unlikely to work with larger parishes and can tend to produce a 'poor relation' parish. Merging parishes enabled the creation of a single worshipping community and reduced the administrative burden but parishioners found it hard to take such a major step in the short term. A single parish for York would be an even more radical change and one not generally welcomed by parishioners or clergy. However there was felt to be considerable scope for a more centralised administration, communication and delivery of activities.

Parishioners increasingly realise that change must happen and a majority of parishioners favoured a more visionary approach rather than short-term solutions. They are aware of the gaps in the pastoral life of their parishes, particularly in respect of youth development, but do not have the capacity to tackle such major issues effectively.

There is considerable support for greater cooperation across the York area and it is clear that parishioners recognise that many aspects of parish life could be better managed and delivered on a wider basis. This unusual combination of lack of clear

support for one of the identified options but willingness to embrace change leads us to believe that a solution to managing the reduction in the number of priests in York lies in the creation of a more flexible structure which allows parishes to work towards long-term change within a clear overarching city-wide strategy developed and implemented by a mix of priests and laity. This structure is known as a Pastoral Area and has been successfully introduced in a number of locations across England and Wales and internationally.

Our principal recommendation is therefore that York is designated as a Pastoral Area and a strategic plan put in place to create a vibrant 'York Community' managed in a collaborative style and with locally determined aims and objectives. The report sets out a detailed background and implementation plan for the delivery of this proposal.

Recommendations

Principal Recommendation for the Long-Term: Creation of a Pastoral Area for York:

- We are recommending that the York area is designated as a Pastoral Area and a strategic plan is put in place to bring 'The York Community' from concept to reality within an approximate 10 year time-frame.
- In the shorter-term we feel that the strengths of each parish community could be sustained and built on, providing an opportunity for priests and parishes to plan and prepare for future changes, and claim ownership for the resulting developments.
- The York Community would be made up of the parishes, schools and other elements of Catholic life that have been the focus of this report. They would eventually be represented through an overarching Pastoral Area Council and would be equally and actively involved in the development of a strategy embodied in a Pastoral Area Plan.
- In the current climate of change no parish can continue to think of itself as independent of the others. Parishes will need to get to know their neighbours better and share strengths and skills, resources and their expertise. Large parishes, which might not appear to require the help of others, may be in a position to ask what they have that can be shared. It will take time and each parish will progress differently.

What is a Pastoral Area?

- A Pastoral Area is a recognised structure that brings together priests, lay people and other religious to work jointly to build a living Christian community. Members of a Pastoral Area care about parish life in all of its constituent parishes and strive to bring the gospel message to all people and places in its overall locality. A fully functioning Pastoral Area picks up on strengths and supports weaknesses and responds to the hopes and concerns of its entire people.
- A Pastoral Area is concerned with issues that impact on the lives of parishioners, integrating their faith into everyday life, providing nourishment and support for their faith and creating an outward focus for the development of a vital Christian community, actively engaged in Jesus' mission of service and influence in the wider world.
- A Pastoral Area is a legitimate entity, recognised by the Church and one which has been implemented nationally and internationally over several years. The experience of the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the Diocese of

Birmingham and Portsmouth has been particularly useful as sources of information for this report.

What Would the York Community Champion?

It would be up to the Pastoral Area representatives and planners themselves to work out their vision, aims and objectives but it is realistic to suggest the following themes as a starting point, based on the findings from the consultation exercise.

- The centrality of the Sunday Mass, ensuring it is accessible to as many people as possible on a local basis.
- Affirmation and support to priests in the essentials of their pastoral and sacramental ministry.
- The effective and widespread provision of pastoral care and catechesis.
- The continuing growth of school, hospital and prison chaplaincy teams, which may include priests, deacons, religious and lay people, and the development of a dynamic approach to church-based youth work.
- The sharing of gifts and expertise on a wider basis.
- Opportunities for the further development of leadership skills by a larger group of people
- The efficient and co-ordinated use of resources, especially people and buildings.
- Initiative that enable greater priority to be given to outreach, especially evangelisation and involvement in the local community.

What Could a Pastoral Area in York Achieve?

More lay involvement in a variety of ministries

While most parishes are familiar with extensive lay involvement in the Sunday Mass, there are other ministries which could be developed within the Pastoral Area structure and which would enable parishioners to provide a more co-ordinated and high quality range of support across the whole area, for example: Baptism, Marriage and RCIA preparation. Support for priests who have an increasing number of funerals could be made available by training and commissioning a York-wide team of Funeral Assistants; lay people who can carry out all types of funerals other than a full Requiem.

More and Improved Pastoral Support

There is also a whole strand of support that could be enhanced and developed at a York-wide level in relation to visiting; older parishioners, those in hospital or people in prison. There is a gap here that could be filled to reduce the danger of parishioners becoming detached from the life of the church. A more sophisticated approach to technology would also enable people to be involved in parish life, even if on a 'virtual' basis. Skype and other video-based technologies are increasingly commonplace and could be a way of keeping people in touch with parish life and activities.

More and improved youth provision

Perhaps one of the most significant areas in which the York Community could make an impact is in the provision of support to young people both in schools and outside of the education system. The views expressed during the consultation on this issue were both strong and numerous. The issue lends itself to a process of discernment and development at a York-wide level which would be a beneficial way of drawing educators and parishioners together.

Collaborative working and eventually an interlocking community

A shift to Pastoral Area working means that priests would eventually work as a team, across the York area. Over time the current individual parishes would become an interlocking group of church communities claiming the identity of 'the York Community'. In the shorter-term this could be evidenced by strategic planning of weekend Mass times and also for the special occasions in the liturgical calendar, especially the Easter Triduum and Christmas.

Development of a co-ordinated training programme

It is clear that the development of a thriving Pastoral Area is dependent on visionary thinking backed up by a strong training programme (both pastoral and spiritual) to secure the involvement of a large number of people. This training programme would be a significant means by which a cross-area identity would develop. Such a training plan would have to be resourced and decisions made about where the money would come from to cover its cost.

Co-ordinated administration

It would be sensible to plan for a centralised administration to carry forward the identity of 'the York Community'. An early indication of pastoral development would be the creation of a single bulletin detailing Mass times, events and activities across the current parishes. An added benefit of this new style of bulletin would be for parishes to see what the others were doing and to become more familiar with activities in the wider York area.

Improved and more varied use of church facilities

Administration could be focused on a single building or set of offices which could be remote from parish churches or presbyteries. If this became a reality, in combination with priests moving to smaller accommodation then a number of parish houses (not churches) could be redeployed for other purposes, perhaps generating an income stream which could contribute to the running costs of the pastoral area.

What Are Some of the Challenges?

Appendix 1 provides a more detailed look at the steps necessary to set up a Pastoral Area but at this point it is worthwhile to look at some of the immediate challenges it offers to clergy and laity.

For the Priests Involved:

One of the greatest changes, so far as parish priests are concerned, would be the development of the collaborative style of management embodied in a Pastoral Area structure. This would be exemplified by the creation of a team of priests, regularly celebrating Mass in each other's churches, each with a 'subject specialism' or lead role. A team leader or 'first among equals' would be decided upon and this role would focus on ensuring that common practices were set up and implemented across the area and a full range of supporting consultative bodies existed.

For the Laity:

The laity must also be prepared to rise to the challenges they face. It is true that many parishioners have expressed a willingness to be more active in the work of the Church but there is an underlying doubt that this expressed willingness will actually be translated into action. Any future planning would have to take account of the steps needed to build the capacity and consolidate the willingness of lay members to contribute to the vision.

Parishioners must move away from a mind-set in which lay members 'help' Father when asked or maintain a 'consumer' approach to their faith. A more active and imaginative approach is needed to develop a more sophisticated understanding of being a Catholic within a Pastoral Area setting.

While the challenges are great we believe that the parishioners we have met can, in the longer-term, become a powerful resource through which the Pastoral Area can come into being. In the meantime there are some more practical and urgent decisions that need to be made in York. Our view on the way on these decisions can be managed is as follows.

1. Taking the First Steps

The Bishop and his advisors would set the framework for the development of the pastoral area, with the support of the parish priests involved. As several other Dioceses have gone through this process it is recommended that contact be made with other clergy with experience of the Pastoral Area model so that their experiences can be taken into account. The Archdiocese of Liverpool has implemented the Pastoral Area model through its 'Leaving Safe Harbours' programme and it would be extremely useful to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise that has been gained there.

2. Keeping Parishioners Informed and Updated

Above all other things the parishioners have asked for a clear-cut way forward which takes account of their views and feelings and a decision-making process that they can have confidence in. Apart from making the final report widely available in printed or web-based formats, we would recommend that an open meeting be held at which the background to the final decision-making is explained and the development process for the new Pastoral Area be announced. This would include an outline explanation of the basic function of the Pastoral Area Council and the essential nature of parishioners' involvement in the planning process.

Concluding Remarks

This section concludes our analysis and recommendations for the future of the parishes in the York area. We feel that contributors have expressed a clear understanding of the need for change and a less parochial approach than we found in Redcar. There is a strong plea for greater transparency and meaningful dialogue between the Diocese and parishioners. The laity is looking for leadership and fear a process of 'managed decline'. They want to see a model of outward looking, modern, vibrant, and inclusive church life being demonstrated in York.

Appendix 1

Setting up a Pastoral Area Structure

A Process of Preparation

A process of preparation is required at a number of levels to bring the concept nearer to reality. To be effective a pastoral area requires a shared leadership among clergy and laity which call forth the gifts of visioning, planning, empowering and evaluating. Clergy and deacons will need to have opportunities to increase their understanding of the changes involved in the proposal. Specifically there will be questions over the identity, role and status of a priest within the collaborative style that need to be addressed. Opportunities to explore collaborative styles of working and also the theological vision of pastoral areas would also be required through a process of in-service training.

At the same time the concept must be clearly laid out for parishioners to understand, for them to see the benefits that will emerge from a move to collaborative links between a larger number of parishes. A parish resource pack, or similar, is a useful tool with which to educate parishioners about pastoral areas and their role within them.

In the initial stages of development it is necessary to instigate a process of information sharing through bulletins and joint meetings of lay ministry groups. Planning of shared liturgies and other activities can also be initiated.

Each parish will need to have a mechanism through which developments in the Pastoral Area can be discussed and contributions made to the implementation process. Some parishes will have existing Councils but some do not. A consistent set of pastoral councils will need to be brought into existence with a common set of aims and objectives.

Implementation Steering Group & Implementation Plan

An Implementation Steering Group would be required to take the first formal steps in the creation of the Pastoral Area as an entity in its own right. This group, which would be made up of selected clergy, lay members and leaders of specialisms such as adult formation, liturgy, human and fabric resources, and finance would lead the process of identifying pastoral priorities and translating this shared vision into an action plan. It would be their responsibility to set up appropriate working groups to collect as much information as possible relevant to the development of the Pastoral Area. Part of their work would be to develop the awareness and understanding of the parishes involved and how, in practical and theological terms they can begin the process of working closely together. As this work develops proposals may emerge about centralising administrative systems and employing staff.

Handing on to a Pastoral Area Council

The Implementation Group would cease to exist once its constituent parts had gathered the information required from which to create a Pastoral Area Plan to be implemented by a Pastoral Area Council.

The Pastoral Area Council would carry out the work finally identified within the Pastoral Area Plan. Such a plan is likely to have 10 year time-frame and include a vision, mission, aims and objectives and action plans. It would be the framework through which liturgy would be co-ordinated across constituent parishes as well as formation in faith and management of finances and resources. Some of these activities would be:

- Training and on-going formation of Lay Leaders, Eucharistic Ministers, Readers, Sacristans, Children's Liturgists (including sacramental preparation) etc.
- Training and on-going formation of Catechists, including those involved in Baptism preparation, RCIA preparation, Marriage preparation, Funeral Assistants,
- Foundation studies in pastoral leadership
- Financial planning and accountability
- Effective building management and utilisation
- Effective development of cross-parish communication
- Effective development of youth provision

An outline implementation plan follows but it is important to note that the success of any planning is related to the level of ownership claimed by the constituencies involved. A plan for the York Community would be tailored to local circumstances by people in the best position to understand the area, its people and their challenges and opportunities.

Possible Timetable/Implementation Plan

Action	Led by	Timing
Agreement to adopt pastoral area as a way forward	Bishop and advisors	Year 1 Month 1
Announcement that this will be happening	Bishop	Year 1 by Month 2
Identify core Implementation Group members, empower them to set terms of reference and membership for time limited research groups	Bishop and advisors	Year 1 by Month 3
Set up key research groups with terms of reference to gather a body of information to be used in the process of identifying longer term priorities, aims and objectives	Implementation Group	Year 1 on-going
Meet with experts in the field of setting up pastoral areas. Clergy to clergy, laity to laity, whole groups. Identify lessons to learn, things to be aware of	Implementation Group	Year 1 by Month 4
Communicate action plan for Implementation Group to parishioners and continue with regular updates	Implementation Group	Year 1 by Month 5 and ongoing
Instigate a process through which parishes can create their own pastoral council structures and planning to ensure close liaison with Pastoral Area Leadership.	Implementation Group	Year 1 by Month 5 and on-going