

## Introduction

Each year, in our Diocese, there is a pilgrimage to the village of Aust in South Gloucestershire. This village derives its name from St Augustine of Canterbury, sent to England by Pope Gregory the Great in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. When Augustine arrived in England there had already been Christians in England for many years and it was in Aust that he met a gathering of the local bishops.

The task entrusted to Augustine was to preach to the unconverted and to organise the structures of the Church. They were so daunted with the mission assigned to them that Augustine and his monks returned to Rome to request the Pope's permission to give up before he actually arrived here. Pope Gregory sent him back to go to England.

In the centuries since Augustine the Church in England has had times of great success and severe difficulties. The upheaval of the Reformation saw a transformation of Christianity in this country which rendered the Catholic Church in England a small persecuted minority.

Nearer to our own time, the twentieth century was a time of great expansion for the Catholic Church. It was a time when the Catholic population grew significantly and that produced a great programme of building schools and churches. The past 40 years has also been a time of renewal and change as we have assimilated the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

Today we stand at a new moment in the long history of the Catholic Church in England. We do not know what the future will bring but we do know that we face exactly the same task as St Augustine: we are called to proclaim the Gospel and organise the structures to make best use of the resources of the Church for the service of the Gospel.

Like St Augustine we may feel daunted and wish to turn back but we are called to be a people of hope, looking to the future with a confidence that God is with us, guiding us into a future not yet revealed to us.

Part of our preparation for the future was the diocesan-wide consultation process "*Seeking the Face of Christ*" during which a very strong sense emerged that, though we recognise an incredible richness in our past and present, there are aspects of how we operate as a diocese, especially with regard to how we are organised for evangelisation and pastoral care, that need to be reconsidered. This need to reconsider our structures was taken into account in our Diocesan Guidelines "***Called to be a People of Hope***", where, tellingly, it has been included in the section '*Church as Communion*'. We are reminded that

"The root of our understanding of Church as Communion is not ensuring efficient management but understanding what sort of Church God is calling us to be. Pope John Paul II in his letter to mark the beginning of the new millennium reminded us that when the structures of the Church reflect the self-giving love of the Trinity then this: "spirituality of communion supplies institutional reality with a soul". (NMI 45)

We trust in God that he will give us all that we need to achieve the mission he entrusts to us.

## Aim of this Report

The task given to the committee which has prepared this report is outlined in *“Called to be a People of Hope”* on page 15:

***“A committee to be formed to review existing deanery and parish structures. In the light of projected numbers of clergy and pastoral needs, the committee will make recommendations to the Bishop, the Council of Priests, Council of Deacons and the Diocesan Pastoral Council. This report will form the basis of structural changes in our parish system and how they will be implemented.***

***This group will make a report to the Bishop by Autumn 2009”.***

The Committee was chaired by Canon Bernard Massey (Gloucester) and its members were Mr Roy Beckwith (Minehead) Canon John Cunningham (Taunton) Mrs Linda Dineen (Bristol) Deacon Kevin Moloney (Clifton) Fr David Mills (Calne) and Mrs Caroline Williams (Salisbury) The Committee interpreted its brief to mean:

- 1 that it was not a decision making group, but that rather it was to make recommendations;
- 2 that it would consult as widely as possible within the diocese;
- 3 the report would be made within the context of the whole thrust of the document *“Called to be a People of Hope”*;
- 4 the recommendations made needed to be within the parameters of the teaching of the Church and the Code of Canon Law;
- 5 that the report would be a tool for Bishop Declan who has ultimate responsibility in Canon Law for providing and ensuring pastoral care within the Diocese;
- 6 laity and clergy will work together to implement whatever plan is ultimately agreed after consultation.

This report thus seeks to make recommendations for the future organization of parishes taking into account the resources of people, clergy and buildings that we currently have, and are likely to have in the foreseeable future. This however must be grounded in the fundamental mission of the Church - which is the proclamation of the Gospel. As Pope John Paul II wrote:

*“God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelisation. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”* (RM 3)

For us as a Diocese all of the above is encapsulated in Bishop Declan’s key question in *“Called to be a People of Hope”*:

***“Is what we do deepening prayer, enabling communion and strengthening mission?”***

## The Consultation Process

To put the above into effect a consultation exercise was launched during the Spring of 2009. All parishes, through their parish priests, were asked what changes they would like to see implemented in the diocese as regards adjustments to parish and deanery structures. They were also asked which parishes they felt they would be most able to work with to further the mission of the church and ensure the necessary pastoral care for God's people. A large majority of parishes responded and there were also several responses from individuals or groups. In preparing this report, these responses have been taken into account as far as possible, though due to the sometimes varying views expressed by respondents this has not always proved entirely possible. Listed below are some of the structural elements considered in preparing the recommendations for Bishop Declan.

### Parishes

When considering pastoral structures in our Diocese, the logical place to start is at parish level. The parish is the basic unit of the Church within a diocese. The feedback received speaks of a strong sense of the importance of parish identity, and a very strong emotional attachment to it, in our Christian life and faith. This is reflected in the teaching of the church:

“the parish, while in need of constant renewal, continues to maintain and to carry out its particular mission, which is indispensable and of great relevance for pastoral care and the life of the Church”. (*Church in Europe 15*)

Canon law defines a parish:

‘A parish is a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor.’  
(*Canon 515.1*)

The Church also teaches that when a diocese is organised the essential grouping is the parish:

‘Each diocese or other particular church is to be divided into distinct parts or parishes.’  
(*Canon 374.1*)

In our Diocese we are currently organised into 107 parishes grouped into 13 deaneries.

## Parishes Working Together

When parishes work together there is no mandatory way in which this has to be organised. Our current structure encourages us to work together in deaneries. Many responses to the consultation questions have suggested that our deanery system works better in some places than in others and that those deaneries that cover predominantly rural areas differ substantially from those that cover urban areas.

Structures such as deaneries, clusters of parishes or a combination of these are at the discretion of the bishop.

Canon law states;

*To foster pastoral care by means of common action, several neighbouring parishes can be joined together in special groups.* (Canon 374.2)

## Parish Priests

The Congregation for the Clergy has also clarified the role of the parish and the priest in the recent document *'The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community'*:

*'A parish is a specific community of the faithful of Christ (christifideles), established on a stable basis within a particular Church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a parish priest as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. Thus, the entire life of the parish, as well as the significance of its apostolic commitments to society, have to be understood and lived in terms of an organic communion between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood.'* (s.18)

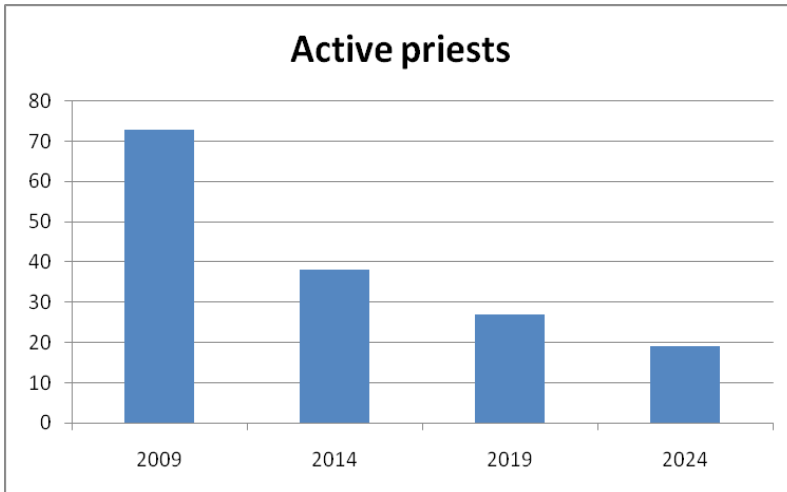
This document also restates the necessity that the pastor of each parish is to be a priest:

*'The mission of pastor in a parish, which implies the full care of souls, absolutely requires the exercise of priestly orders. Hence, in addition to ecclesial communion, canon law explicitly stipulates that only a man constituted in the sacred order of the presbyterate can be validly nominated to the office of parish priest.'* (s.20)

Taking the above into account it has been necessary to look at the number of priests who currently serve in the local church of Clifton. It has also been necessary to make some likely projections regarding the number of priests who will be serving the Diocese in the foreseeable short to medium term future. The graphs below are hopefully useful in providing some information in this regard and some possible future scenarios.

**Worst Case Scenario**

– All priests retire (from office of parish priest) at 65, and no Ordinations.

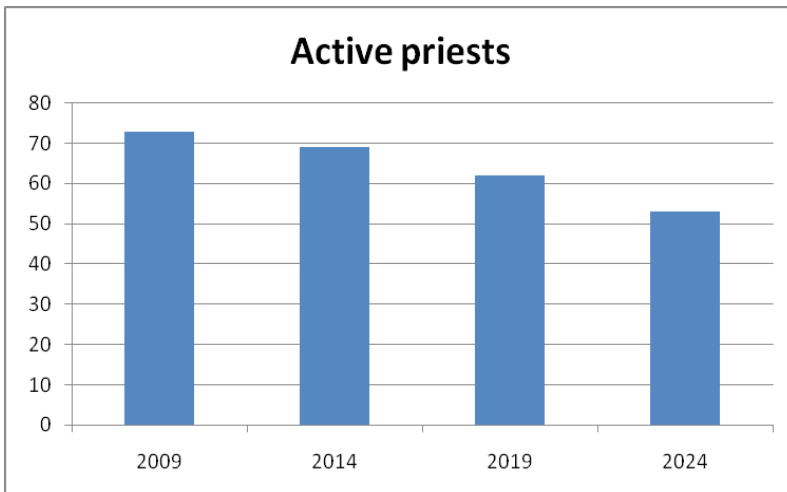


Active parish priests

2009	73
2014	38
2019	27
2024	19

**Best Case Scenario**

– All priests retire at 75 (from office of parish priest), one Ordination per year.

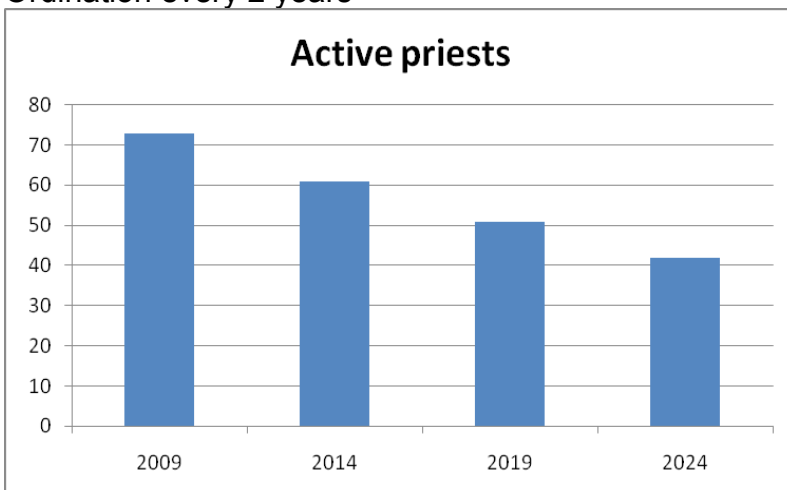


Active parish priests

2009	73
2014	69
2019	62
2024	53

**Median Case Scenario**

- 3/4 of priests aged 65-75 remain in office of parish priest and there is one Ordination every 2 years



Active parish priests

2009	73
2014	61
2019	51
2024	42

## Guiding Principles

It was felt that, when the responses to the consultation process were considered and a report prepared, some guiding principles were needed to inform the modus operandi. In drawing up these guiding principles, the teaching of the Church was the main point of departure, but practical considerations have, of course, come into play in considering how this teaching is applied in our particular circumstances. These principles are listed below.

In the light of projected numbers of clergy and pastoral needs, most parishes need to be grouped together.

- 1 Each parish must be led by a priest. Though no firm proposal has been made in this regard at this time, one way forward when two or more parishes are grouped together permanently with only one priest providing pastoral care, it might be better to amalgamate the different parishes into one larger parish. This would mean that the pastor would be parish priest of one consolidated parish with two or more church buildings and worshipping communities. If not, he would be parish priest of one of the parishes and priest in charge of the other. The latter situation would most likely cause feelings of second class treatment on the part of the faithful in the second parish.
- 2 There is no single model of clustering that would be appropriate across the whole Diocese. Circumstances such as size of parish, geography and the ministry of religious orders have all been taken into account.
- 3 All recommendations made have, as far as possible, been based upon responses received as part of the consultation process.
- 4 Pre-existing arrangements/plans for co-operation have been taken into account.
- 5 Canon Law states that a priest may not celebrate Mass more than three times on a Sunday (*Canon 905*); any suggested clustering have taken this into account. Some anomalies however do exist within the proposals in this regard. When future arrangements are made at local level it would be necessary to resolve such anomalies.
- 6 Groups should not, where possible, cut across county and other secular boundaries.
- 7 A serious attempt has been made to use the language of the Church – parishes, deaneries rather than the language of business management and efficiency such as unit or numbering.
- 8 Local decisions about Mass times, and the sustainability of small congregations/mass centres etc are best made at local level.

## Compiling the Report

Once the many responses to the consultation document were received, they were all read and considered. The information was collated and using the guiding principles outlined above, the recommendations for the future parish structures in the diocese were compiled. Additional factors taken into account were geography and the size of church buildings. Current deanery boundaries were not deemed an important factor in the initial process and no recommendations regarding deaneries and their future shape would be made until after the meeting with the priests of the Diocese in October 2009 and the feedback they give on the proposals. It was considered appropriate that new deaneries or such larger groupings should emerge as a result of new parish structures and thus to a certain extent evolve organically. The final plan would include a section on new deaneries or other similar such groupings.

## Observations

- The committee has been acutely aware of the widely different settings and circumstances in which parishes fulfil their mission and thus a very real attempt has been made to take these differences into account. There is no 'one size fits all' solution.
- In the majority of cases – clustering has taken place in accordance with suggestions received
- Not every parish has responded. In some cases the response has clearly been from the laity in a parish.
- There are some cases where, though a response has not been received, agreement with the recommendations is assumed as this reflects current working practice.
- Even where parishes have not been formally linked, collaboration and joint action between parishes is to be encouraged;
- There are some parishes, due usually to size or geographic location, which do not need to be joined with others and are probably best left to function singly.

### Parishes that should continue to operate 'singly'

Location	Parish/Church Name	Diocesan Priests
Amesbury	Christ the King	1
Bath	St Mary	1
Bristol	Cathedral Church of SS Peter & Paul (to include University Chaplaincy)	2
Bristol	Holy Family	1
Bristol	St Bonaventure	1
Chard	English Martyrs	1
Chippenham	The Assumption of the B. V. M.	1
Chipping Sodbury	St Lawrence	1
Cirencester	St Peter	1
Devizes	Our Lady, The Immaculate Conception	0 <sup>a</sup>
Fairford	St Thomas of Canterbury	1
Frome	St Catharine	1
Gloucester	St Peter	1
Stroud	The Immaculate Conception	1
Swindon	Holy Family	1
Swindon	Holy Rood	2
Swindon	St Mary	1
Tisbury	The Sacred Heart	1
Trowbridge	St John the Baptist	1
Warminster	St George	1
Wincanton	SS Luke & Teresa	1

The 'Downside Parishes' have been left out of this document as it is understood that their pastoral needs will continue to be met by the Abbey clergy.

<sup>a</sup> It is anticipated that the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales will continue to minister in this parish, hence no allocation of a diocesan priest.

## Suggested Parish Groups

Location	Parish/Church Name	Diocesan Priests
Bath Batheaston	St John The Good Shepherd	1
Bath Bath Peasedown	St Alphege St Peter & Paul St Joseph	1
Bedminster Knowle Knowle West	Holy Cross St Gerard Majella Christ the King	2
Bridgwater Burnham on Sea	St Joseph Our Lady and English Martyrs	1
Calne Melksham	St Edmund St Anthony of Padua	1
Cheltenham Cheltenham Cheltenham	St Gregory Sacred Hearts St Thomas More	3
Chipping Camden Stow on the Wold	St Catharine Our Lady & St Kenelm	1
Brockworth Churchdown	St Patrick Our Lady of Perpetual Succour	1
Clevedon Nailsea Portishead	The Immaculate Conception St Francis of Assisi St Joseph	1 <sup>b</sup>
Coleford Cinderford Newent	St Margaret Mary Our Lady of Victories Our Lady of Lourdes	2
Bradford-on-Avon Corsham	St Thomas More St Patrick	1
Downend Frenchay	St Augustine St John Fisher	1
Dursley Nympsfield	St Dominic St Joseph	1
Bristol City Centre Easton	St Mary on the Quay St Nicholas of Tolentino	1 <sup>c</sup>
Filton Southmead	St Teresa of the Child Jesus St Vincent de Paul	1
Fishponds Kingswood Redfield	St Joseph Our Lady of Lourdes St Patrick	2

<sup>b</sup> It is anticipated that the Franciscans will continue to minister in this area, hence the allocation of 1 diocesan priest for this group

<sup>c</sup> It is hoped that the order of Divine Word Missionaries will continue to minister in St Mary on the Quay, hence the allocation of only 1 diocesan priest for this group

Glastonbury Shepton Mallet	Our Lady, St Mary of Glastonbury St Michael	1
Lawrence Weston Shirehampton	Our Lady of the Rosary St Bernard	1
Marlborough Wroughton	St Thomas More St Joseph	1
Dulverton Minehead	St Stanislaus Sacred Heart	1
Salisbury Salisbury Salisbury	St Osmund St Gregory Holy Redeemer	2
Stonehouse Woodchester	St Joseph The Annunciation	1
Swindon Wootton Bassett	St Peter Sacred Heart	1
Taunton Taunton Wellington	St George St Teresa St John Fisher	2
Malmesbury Tetbury	St Aldhelm St Michael	0 <sup>d</sup>
Thornbury Wotton-under-Edge	Christ the King Holy Cross	0 <sup>e</sup>
Matson Tuffley	St Augustine of Canterbury English Martyrs	1
Cheddar Wells	Our Lady, Queen of the Apostles St Joseph and St Teresa	1
Henbury Westbury on Trym	St Anthony Sacred Heart	1
Weston-super-Mare Weston-super-Mare Weston-super-Mare	Corpus Christi Our Lady of Lourdes St Joseph	2
Keynsham Whitchurch	St Dunstan St Bernadette	1
Kemerton Tewkesbury Winchcombe	St Benet St Joseph St Nicholas	1
Chew Magna Withywood	Sacred Heart St Pius X	1
Somerton Yeovil	St Dunstan Holy Ghost	0 <sup>f</sup>

<sup>d</sup> It is hoped that the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales will continue to minister in these parishes, hence no allocation of a diocesan priest for this group.

<sup>e</sup> It is hoped that the Salvatorians will continue to minister in these parishes, hence no allocation of a diocesan priest for this group.

<sup>f</sup> It is anticipated that the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales will continue to minister in these parishes, hence no allocation of a diocesan priest for this group.

## The Process Forward:

- 1 Once the draft report and recommendations have been finalised, the document would form the basis of a meeting with the priests of the Diocese. Some feedback from the priests would be taken on the day, but the priests would then have until 8th December to feed back to the Committee any further thoughts, ideas or suggestions that they and their parish wish to give.
- 2 If a parish or group wishes to propose a change to their grouping we ask that they obtain the agreement of any other parishes that would be affected.
- 3 It is fervently hoped that the draft recommendations will be discussed within parishes themselves and the views of pastoral councils and laity will inform the feedback from parishes to the Committee.
- 4 In January the Committee would prepare a final document for approval by the Bishop for Lent 2010.
- 5 Details would then be published as to when and how the plan would be launched for implementation.
- 6 All parishes should begin or continue planning for the future and do so with a sense of purpose in a positive manner.
- 7 Parish Pastoral Councils could begin working with other Pastoral Councils in their cluster.
- 8 A process would be put in place for new parish groupings, where they are to be formed, and new 'deanery' or other larger groupings, to share their experience and best practice within such forums as the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Councils of Priests and Deacons.
- 9 All feedback should be directed in the first instance to either

Mrs Caroline Williams Called to be a People of Hope,  
Alexander House 160 Pennywell Rd Bristol BS5 0TX  
or by email to [called@cliftondiocese.com](mailto:called@cliftondiocese.com)

Please respond by 8<sup>th</sup> December 2009

## Some Possible Implications for Priests

Though not strictly part of the remit of the Committee it has been felt that the following recommendations be made as they would help priests fulfil the role of pastor in a way that not only provides for the pastoral needs of the people they serve but would assist priests themselves in this vital task.

1. The suggested structures makes provision for priests who, for whatever reason, wish to continue their ministry among the people of God, but who are unable or do not believe it best to be appointed as parish priests, to continue their ministry in association with another priest in a large parish or group of parishes.
2. It should be held in mind that no priest should say more than 3 Sunday Masses.
3. Newly ordained priests should ideally be appointed as assistants for five years, preferably spending time in two parishes.

## Conclusion

It is hoped that this report and the recommendations it contains will in a very real way provide an effective way forward for the local Church of Clifton as we seek to be the authentic voice of evangelization in our time and place just as the monks with St Augustine were in theirs.

They faced many challenges, as do we. As a praying, worshipping community we all face the challenge of living the gospel and sharing it with those around us, but we look to the future with confidence because we are called to be A People of Hope.

We believe that these recommendations will assist our communities of people and clergy to deepen prayer, enable communion and strengthen mission.

Canon Bernard Massey  
October 2009