

Report of the Diocesan Council of Laity Meeting

Held in the Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation, Poringland

On Saturday 7th May 2011

'Go out to the whole world, make disciples of all nations'
Points to Ponder.

We decided together, at the last Council of Laity, to make Evangelisation our central theme at the next meeting on May 7th. There can be no more important topic than this: it is the great summons of Jesus himself.

I asked everyone at this meeting of the Council of Laity to discuss and come up with, practical ideas for how we can better joyfully proclaim the Good News to our Diocese, not only in words, but in the way that we live the Gospel.

What have we learnt from our 'Learning Together' days, especially the most recent ones on evangelisation teams in each of our parishes?

Here are some thoughts to include in our discussions, but we do need to ensure that we come away with ideas we can use and put into practice.

We remember, first and foremost, the words of St. Peter "You are a chosen race, a consecrated priesthood, a people set apart to sing the praises of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9-10

Also *Lumen Gentium* (N.38). How can we live the words, as the Second Vatican Council puts it: "Every individual lay person must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus, and as a sign that God lives."

We also need to hear the words of Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (N.14). "We wish to confirm, once more, that the task of evangelising of all people constitutes the essential mission of the church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise, that is to say in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace....."

During the Deanery Discussions, the main points raised, were as follows:

The focus throughout the meeting was on Evangelisation, finding practical ways to proclaim the Gospel to all creation. Some people were concerned that the hierarchy was not listening to them, as perhaps they might: people were not always comfortable with their faith and needed to raise questions about its content and expression. Making people warmly welcome does not always come easily to everyone and we needed to use the full range of resources in order to reach out to others including IT, websites, etc. Sometimes this involves moving on from our 'comfort zones' and being prepared to take risks as the first Christians from the Upper Room at Pentecost. This might include having the courage to knock on doors and doing some of those things we find naturally difficult. We may need to reach even simply beyond parish and deanery boundaries, and explore ways of doing things together as deaneries. Why, for example, were there so few representatives from Ipswich at the meeting?

Various good things had been organised, for example by certain deaneries, Clare Ward and others had arranged Learning Together and Study Days across the Diocese, to help pass on the Faith. There was also the Eccles Programme and events organised by the Sion Community.

There is more to all of this than simply study and training. We need to ask how we can fully integrate our faith into the way we live and are as disciples of Jesus. How can we inspire others with Gospel Joy so that they 'catch' the faith and are inflamed by it, rather than simply accept it.

Members gave as examples, a regular Mens' Breakfast, at which people shared their faith with each other, work for Justice and Peace, Bible Study and reflection and practical care for the sick. A key principle in the early church was that we saw how faithful we were by our active love for one another.

As Pope Paul IV pointed out, there have been big changes in society and culture and we need to take account of all of these when seeking to proclaim the Gospel. This includes being prepared to go forward and outward together as Christian Communities, fired with a passion for Justice and the Kingdom of God.

We need to advertise much better what we already do together, presenting it as good news, rather than bad, and learning from those with expertise in communication skills. We need to be ready to be much more vocal and affirming about our faith even if it contradicts that which is seen to be politically correct. Reaching out to the young in an attractive way has to be essential to this. We need to rediscover together a pride and joy in being Christian, we can sometimes be too restrictive and parochial in the way we are as Catholics. This obviously involves being warmly welcoming to everyone, without exception. Our presentation of our faith needs to be vibrant, as well as including basic teaching about what we believe. Perhaps we have lost the original sense of urgency which we knew at the first Pentecost.

Each individual Christian should be involved, each in his or her own way with whatever skills, talents and gifts they have. One example was the ecumenical 'Network Peterborough'. There are many other ways, we can explore together, of proclaiming the Gospel in ways that are 'non-threatening' and which do not involve 'making bread with stale yeast'. Central to all of this is the way we celebrate the liturgy and pray together and our use and variety of music.

We were informed of the Birmingham Archdiocese 'I am with You' Programme, used and adapted in parishes.

Sharing 'best practice' will always be important for the way we move forward together. There is little point in having wonderful liturgy if it cannot be easily and distinctly heard.

At the heart of all these thoughts and ideas, was the need for much greater mutual Trust and Transparency. We should probably revisit the whole question of Marriage and Family Life, much greater emphasis on educating the laity in their faith, and ecumenical and inter-religious co-operation. Our current process of long-term strategic planning will be an important part of all this. How do we become positively 'The Church Militant' in a way which is appealing and attractive to others, rather than confrontational, and aggressive?