

Diocese of East Anglia – Council of Laity
The New Role of the Laity & Long-term Strategic Planning
OLEM-OLOL Discussion – 28 October 2010

There was a special pastoral planning meeting, held on 28th October, as part of the 19-month Diocesan-wide consultation which was just beginning in October. It was also a sharing of ideas in anticipation of the discussion planned for the forthcoming Council of Laity meeting, set for 20th November, whose theme would be "The New Role of the Laity".

Requests to share ideas and invitations to participate in the meeting were communicated via the Parish Forum (14th October) and the Parish Bulletin, and two key documents for the discussions – Diocesan Long Term Strategic Planning - Introduction, and Diocesan Pastoral Plan on the Role of Laity – were made available to the Parish in advance via:

<http://www.theseconnote.com/olem-olol>

Some of the ideas which emerged and which sparked further reflection and discussion were:

- what is the purpose of Margaret Beaufort Institute; could this include providing trained women for more shared ministries, and for taking responsibility for a parish if needed?
- could we explore a return/expansion of the option for women in the (permanent) diaconate, such as in the early Church (and Carthusian nuns)?
- the Church in Germany and Austria is said to have helpful, special lay pastoral roles (e.g. Seelsorger, Pastoragraphe?), which could be worth exploration, to see what might apply
- villages (and rural residences) have some special concerns
 - e.g. the loss of nearby Mass centres
 - however house Masses can be helpful for the local community
 - it can be difficult to get to know people, especially discovering the Catholics in the area
 - perhaps there should be a Catholic representative in each village area
 - all communications (e.g. village newsletters) should include contact e-mail, phone numbers
 - these contacts should be added to the Parish Directory (with individual's agreement)
 - the Directory and contacts could help identify house Mass interests, transport needs
 - local house Mass groups could perhaps cluster, joining other groups nearby
 - clusters could perhaps organise cycles of house Masses, other liturgies, prayer meetings
- if we cannot sustain all current Masses at some point, we could consider taking turns as to which of the usual times will be the Mass that week and which the prayer and perhaps Communion service or other liturgy; this could help maintain the communities, choirs and customs (e.g. coffee, Traidcraft) which grow up around a particular Mass and time
- a parish Communication Officer could be very helpful, including for internal communications
- might it help with the priestly vocations if there was a return to the option of married clergy?
- we need much more collaboration (and less giving and taking orders)
- what is the proper use of authority, given Jesus' charge to love and serve one another?
- as our population and residential distribution changes, we may need sometimes to rent space for liturgies and gatherings, much like the 'vineyard' churches?
- it is good to get to know each other, such as with house Masses, which can also be a place to welcome those who may not always prefer a church (e.g. some returning Catholics)
- the Church in Africa (e.g. Nigeria) is reported as organising their Parish Councils by having each group pick a representative, while individuals are welcome as well
- the English Church can seem to take a very compartmentalised, privatised approach, including for the spiritual life; not everyone seems to want to be part of a vibrant community (now or ever)
- excellent communication is crucial for all the needs and important changes which we will be facing in the Parish and Diocese, and along with bulletin/newsletter/etc. notices, the key announcements should be read out from the front (e.g. from the sanctuary, by priest or laity) to help emphasise and draw key matters to everyone's attention

A follow-up meeting will be planned sometime after 20th November, with further notes available subsequently.

Ronald Haynes
OLEM Council of Laity Representative
20 November 2010