

Partnerships will help us to become stronger, says Bishop

A VISION of flourishing communities and greater support for priests - consolidated by a network of 18 parish partnerships - has been outlined by Bishop Seamus Cunningham.

The plan, unveiled at meetings in Dunston and Darlington last month, marks the Forward Together in Hope initiative's final phase.

More than 1400 people attended the events to view a 'map' of future parish partnerships, following an intense consultation period.

Music streamed through Carmel College hall in Darlington as over 400 men and women of all ages gathered to hear Bishop Seamus unveil the long-awaited Diocesan partnership plans.

An atmosphere of peace and harmony was evoked by the melodious piano, played by talented musician and Carmel Sixth Form student Anna Wilson, as anticipation built for the announcement to

follow.

Opening that meeting, Bishop Seamus announced that the parishes would work together and share resources, making them sustainable for the future.

The importance of freeing priests to concentrate on calling the community to worship and the celebration of the sacraments was also highlighted.

An emphasis was placed on the need for wider engagement of the lay community in helping parishes to manage financial and administrative areas.

An eight page booklet entitled: 'Forward Together in Hope: One Diocese, 18 Partnerships, Unlimited Potential' was issued during the concurrent meetings, detailing Vicariate lists

Bishop Seamus said: "A great number of you have really engaged with the Forward Together in Hope review.

"We have asked: 'what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus and how can we face the future with confidence'?"

"These questions were a necessary part of restructuring and reforming our diocese.

"We want people to share their skills and leadership and there is the need for each partnership to carefully review its resources.

"Great care was taken to try to ensure that parishes were supported.

"At the Youth Village, they are getting an encounter with Christ.

"A partnership is a group of parishes agreeing to work together, to share resources, both human and material, to become stronger and better equipped for furthering the Kingdom of God."

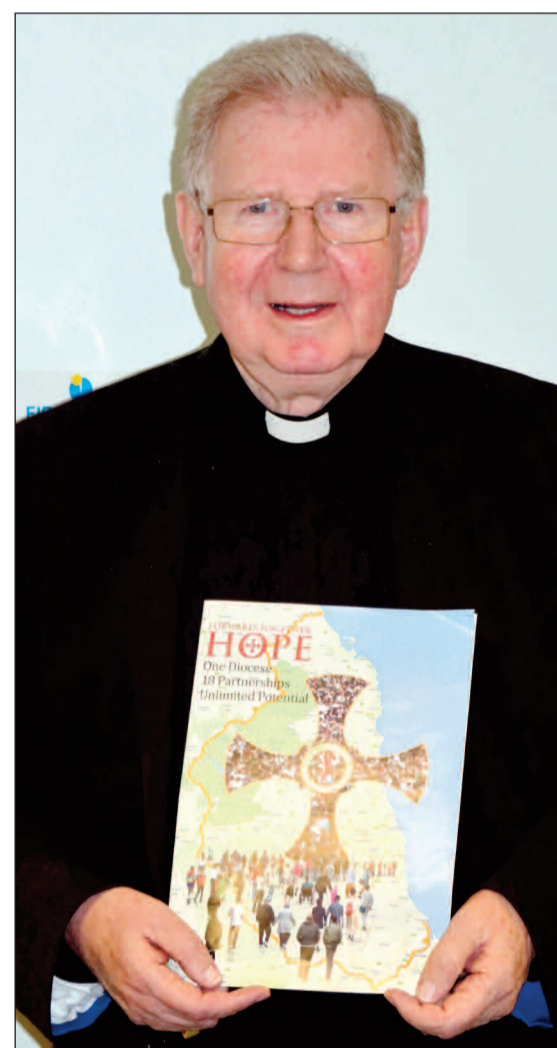
Bishop Seamus said that he was convinced that partnerships will enable formation programmes to be developed and delivered locally.

He stressed the need for support for smaller communities and that the "gifts, talents and financial resources in a wider area can be put at the service of more people".

At both presentations - delivered by Diocesan Development Officer Tony Sacco in Darlington and Fr. Jim O'Keefe in Dunston - it was agreed that a thorough review of all property would be necessary in the coming months.

Across the Diocese, feedback has been positive, with comments from the Darlington audience including: "It was a very positive evening and well organised", "I finally feel hopeful for the future of this Diocese", "We feel that this process and these plans will help us to grow stronger and support one another" and "I truly feel uplifted after this evening's meeting".

● Read further reports on P2, 3 and 9.



□ Bishop Seamus Cunningham with the Forward Together in Hope booklet which details the final plans.



□ Parishoners gathered at Carmel College in Darlington to hear the Bishop outline the Church's plans for the future.



□ Youngsters from across the North East with the Event's 'Superman' Andrew Young. The next takes place on March 15.

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No – it's a hall full of North East 'super heroes'

MORE than 100 youngsters from all over the North East united to celebrate their faith at the monthly Event Faith Celebration Night at St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn, recently.

Dressed up in their favourite super hero costumes, they explored how they could be 'super heroes' in their local communities.

Facing nuns, priests and teachers in a special Pie Face contest to see if they had God-given courage, they also created super hero dances and mimes, took part in some daunting trust games and enjoyed music by Cody and the Band.

YMT's Bridget delivered an inspirational talk to the group about her CAFOD work in Bulgaria and Ethiopia and answered questions.

The Event is the brainchild of Frank O'Neill, Head Teacher at St. Joseph's Catholic Academy, Heb-

burn, and a team of volunteers who wanted to establish an opportunity for young people to gather together to celebrate their faith, journey together on their spiritual paths and explore their beliefs.

Event team member Andrew Young said: "After a year of planning, it has grown from strength to strength.

"Student leadership is one of the key features of each event. This ranges from students leading the music, dance and drama, to welcoming people to the Event and co-ordinating small group activities. Several of our Pope John Paul II award candidates and CAFOD young leaders are also engaged in this ministry.

"We have just held our fifth monthly Event. Numbers are growing rapidly, with new schools participating every time. Bishop

Seamus has also attended several Event celebration nights too.

"One of the most pleasing outcomes of the Event nights for me has been the fact that several agnostic students who have attended have been baptised or begun preparations for baptism because they have been so inspired by the faith and spirituality of the evenings in such a fun and energised way.

"We have also had several parents approach us to tell us that the Event has made them re-engage with their faith, some having been lapsed for several decades."

The next Event nights take place on March 15, May 17 and June 21 at St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn, Tyne and Wear, NE31 2ET. To take part email Andrew Young at YoungA@stjosephs.uk.net or call him on 07464 617908.